

Civil religion in Britain, 1707 – *c.* 1800

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Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee. All dates have been presented in the New Style.

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Chapter 1

Hanoverian civil religion and its intellectual resources

The twentieth century which has its own hairs to split may have little patience with Arius and Athanasius who burdened the world with a quarrel about a diphthong, but the historian has not achieved historical understanding, has not reached that kind of understanding in which the mind can find rest, until he has seen that that diphthong was bound to be the most urgent matter in the universe for those people.¹

The problem of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

It was Rousseau who most famously posed the problem. In *The social contract* (1762), he argued that it was impossible for Christianity to become a civil religion. Christians could never espouse the public faith of the secular *patrie*. Among the ancient pagans, argued Rousseau, ‘every Religion was tied exclusively to the laws of the State which prescribed it’ and no citizen distinguished between ‘its Gods and its laws’.² The church was subjected to the state and virtuous citizenship was compatible with religious piety. However, Christianity introduced a ‘Spiritual Kingdom’ that separated ‘the theological from the political system’. The prospect of posthumous rewards and punishments in the ‘Kingdom of the other world’ became the occasion for civil disorder as Christians fought over its nature.³ Rousseau endorsed the claim of Niccolò Machiavelli in the *Discourses on Livy* (c. 1517) that Christianity was an otherworldly religion with no interest in the civil life of the mortal world. Machiavelli had upbraided Christianity as a religion that made ‘us place a lower value on worldly honour’, glorified ‘humble and contemplative men rather than active ones’, and rendered ‘the world weak’. It left sincere believers the pawns of priestly ‘wicked men’ who pursued temporal ambitions under sacerdotal guises. Christian revelation had no civic worth because it made slaves of men and set the church above the political order. Conversely, Roman paganism had harnessed popular piety for patriotic *grandezza*.⁴

Aside from subverting citizenship, Rousseau believed Christianity’s second great offence was its attitude to the church-state relationship. In the mood of the intense anticlericalism of the Enlightenment in France, to which contributed the roving Genevan, Rousseau argued that Christian priests intrinsically sought to dominate the state. Christian

¹ Herbert Butterfield, *The whig interpretation of history* (New York and London, [1931] 1965), p. 17.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The social contract and other later political writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 144, 143.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford and New York, 1997), pp. 158-9.

ecclesiology had created a 'dual power' and 'a perpetual conflict of jurisdiction which has made any good polity impossible in Christian States'. Although some societies had attempted to subject the church to the civil power, nobody 'succeeded in settling the question of which of the two, the master or the priest, one is obliged to obey'. In England, for instance, monarchs 'established themselves as heads of the Church' since the Protestant Reformation. But they failed to generate a civil religion as Anglican priests still perceived the Church of England as a distinct society independent from the state. Monarchs 'have made themselves not so much its masters as its Ministers; they have acquired not so much the right to change it as the power to preserve it; they are not its lawgivers, they are merely its Princes'.⁵

Rousseau argued that a truly reformed religion was necessary to reconcile the interests of church and state. The only other thinker whom Rousseau believed had attempted to construct a civil religion was Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651), the subtitle of which was *The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill*. Hobbes 'dared to propose reuniting the two heads of the eagle, and to return everything to political unity'. But Hobbes came to understand that 'the domineering spirit of Christianity was inconsistent with his system, and that the interest of the Priest would always be stronger than that of the State'.⁶ Even Hobbes had realised that a Christian civil religion was an oxymoron. For Rousseau, a civil religion must persuade all citizens to subjugate their private interests for the public good. The social contract conferred power to the sovereign within the bounds of 'public utility', and 'it certainly matters to the State that each Citizen have a religion which makes him love his duties'. The sovereign must fix the articles of 'a purely civil profession of faith', enforcing it on pain of banishment or death.⁷ The dogmas of the civil religion should be neither complicated nor numerous. They should propound 'the powerful, intelligent, beneficent, prescient, and provident Deity, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, [and] the sanctity of the social Contract and the Laws'. They should also guard against intolerance, 'a feature of the cult we have just rejected', for, in an intolerant society, 'Priests are the true masters' and 'Kings are but their officers'.⁸

However, Rousseau's argument would not have proven persuasive in Hanoverian Britain, where many intellectuals, lay and clerical, hoped to construct a civil religion within a Christian commonwealth. The hypothesis of this study is that Hanoverian intellectuals

⁵ Rousseau, *Social contract*, p. 145.

⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 150-1.

believed that the Church of England could be transformed into a civil religion. In so doing, they were engaging in a series of debates that connected ancient paganism with Italian humanism and the Enlightenment. They believed that the civil state could secure its ascendancy over the priests and prevent the domination of the priestly order. They claimed that the public faith of the Church of England could be one to which all English people should subscribe. They argued that Christians could prioritise wellbeing in this world over the prospect of rewards and punishments in the next one. The sovereign, in the words of Rousseau, could secure the articles of a purely civil profession of faith.

The opportunity to create a Christian civil religion in eighteenth-century England lay in the unique status and role of the Church of England, which institutionalised a public faith predicated at once on catholic apostolicity and a recognition that its doctrines were contingent and imperfect. Theorists of civil religion believed that the Church of England rightly retained authority over the interpretation of revealed truth. But they also argued that the limits of human understanding rendered the truth of the creator unknowable in this world. The articles of faith of the Church of England were to provide the basis of the civil religion of eighteenth-century England because they were products of fallible humans who interpreted imperfectly the nature of the divine being. The success of the civil faith turned on the prioritisation of shared rituals of public worship to express belonging within the Christian commonwealth over insoluble debates about the truth of its articles of faith. Since its *jure divino* authority could not be proven by the gospel message of Jesus Christ, the Church of England owed its status as the public interpreter of the revealed faith to its *jure humano* legitimacy.

To test this hypothesis, the thesis develops the arguments of two intellectual historians of Interregnum and Restoration England and applies them to the eighteenth century. A facet of Richard Tuck's longstanding interest in Rousseau's engagement with Hobbes has been the concept of civil religion. Tuck observed that, in writing *Leviathan*, Hobbes sought to transform Christianity into the civil religion of modern England by rendering the role of its doctrines as performative in the public worship of the commonwealth. Hobbes's civil religion was a solution to the problem of religious pluralism, charting a middle way between Independency and Laudianism.⁹ Mark Goldie has revealed the republican dimensions of seventeenth-century English civil religion by analysing the writings of James Harrington and

⁹ Richard Tuck, 'The "Christian atheism" of Thomas Hobbes', in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford, 1992), 111–130; 'The civil religion of Thomas Hobbes', in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1993), 120–38.

his Restoration followers. Harringtonian civil religion combined a national church with liberty of conscience, prioritising civic service to the republic over theological wrangling about the nature of God.¹⁰ Both Tuck and Goldie noticed how Hobbes, Harrington, and their followers sought to revive the ancient pagan civic religions in the modern Christian world. Although, as Rousseau argued, the source of the faith of the ancient pagans had come from within the civil state, Tuck and Goldie demonstrated how their subjects could insist that primitive Christianity was reconcilable with civil order despite its otherworldliness.

Eighteenth-century English civil religion was quite different from that of the Interregnum and Restoration. It was the civil faith neither of Hobbes's covenanted subjects nor Harrington's republican citizens. It was a product of the synthesis of civility and piety to develop a church whose structures and beliefs were in accord with the interests of the state. Eighteenth-century civil religionists concerned themselves with how to make religion safe by civilising it.¹¹ Their religion was polite and free of its historical corruptions of superstition, enthusiasm, priestcraft, imposture, and intolerance. It was a repudiation of speculative dogma and ritualistic formalism. It was a religion of virtue, sociability, and happiness. It represented the Arminian rejection of the Calvinist insistence on the depravity of human nature and God's arbitrary use of grace. Sometimes, it also located ethical power within human nature, independently of grace.¹² Irrespective of their inward views about the normative truths of the articles of faith of the churches of England and Scotland, civil religionists sought to reconcile them with civil ends. Outward observance of the Reformed religion was a criterion for belonging to the Christian commonwealth of Hanoverian Britain.

The construction of an eighteenth-century Christian civil religion drew from intellectual resources bequeathed by the Protestant Reformation. Civil religionists believed that unreformed Christianity, especially in its Roman Catholic guise, had preached subservience and tyranny. It was the tool of an independent and all-powerful church with its servile monarchs. Theorists of civil religion abjured priestcraft, which signified the fabrication of superstitious beliefs by priests to advance their temporal power. It was not simply that popish priests peddled false doctrines but also that, by their lies, they subverted

¹⁰ Mark Goldie, 'The civil religion of James Harrington', in *The languages of political theory in early-modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, 1987), 197-222; 'Ideology' in *Political innovation and conceptual change*, eds. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell Hanson (Cambridge, 1989), 266-91; 'Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism', in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1993), 209-31.

¹¹ For the role of civility in seventeenth-century religious dispute, see T. M. Bejan, *Mere civility: disagreement and the limits of toleration* (Cambridge, MA, 2017).

¹² Both shifts in Anglican moral religion have been traced by Isabel Rivers in *Reason, grace, and sentiment: a study of the languages of religion and ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1991-2000).

the political order. In modern Britain, however, the idea of the priesthood of all believers gave Christian sanctification to membership of the secular commonwealth. The object of the civil state was the realisation of the primitive religion promised by Jesus Christ in the gospels, in which every man was his own minister.

The terms ‘popery’ and ‘*imperium in imperio*’, once deployed by Protestant Reformers against the bishop of Rome, became general categories for the corrupt doctrines of an impure Christianity and the subjugation of the secular power to priests. In England, the godly prince, who bestrode the church-state relationship by means of the royal supremacy, was to lead the vanguard against corrupt religion. The civil church owed its structures to the magisterial Reformation launched by Henry VIII. It was to be defended by the monarch, *fidei defensor*, who wielded the sword. In Scotland, *jure humano* presbytery was to replace both *jure divino* priests and the godly prince in defence of the civil faith. It was because the loyalty of Roman Catholics lay not with the sovereign temporal power but with the bishop of Rome that theorists of civil religion during the eighteenth century, concurring with John Locke, largely could not extend toleration to them.¹³ It is a common refrain that anti-Catholicism was an integral aspect of the development of a multi-national British identity.¹⁴ But the suggestion that Roman Catholics could not be true citizens of the commonwealth was equally a feature of civil religion.

Christians would also reconstruct the insights of ancient Roman paganism. The freedom of the Roman republic was syncretised with the gospel promise of Jesus Christ so that the latter would become a modern Christian version of Ciceronian *religio* stripped of *superstitio*. Hanoverian civil religion was that of the secular commonwealth at prayer and the institutional agents of its church, the parochial clergymen, were as much public officeholders as the Justices of the Peace or the overseers of the poor. Their church was an institution of the civil state. It would cleanse society of sanctimonious prelacy and ritualistic dogma, reorienting public life towards toleration, reason, and moral virtue. The two heads of

¹³ In 1667 Locke wrote of ‘Roman Catholics that are subjects of any prince but the pope’ and argued that ‘blending such opinions with their religion, reverencing them as fundamental truths, and submitting to them as articles of their faith, ought not to be tolerated by the magistrate in the exercise of their religion unless he can be secured, that he can allow one part, without the spreading of the other, and that the propagation of these dangerous opinions may be separated from their religious worship, which I suppose is very hard to be done’. See *An essay concerning toleration*, which remained in manuscript until it was published during the nineteenth century, in *A letter concerning toleration and other writings*, ed. Mark Goldie (Indianapolis, 2010), pp. 117-18.

¹⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1832* (New Haven and London, 1992); Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century England: a political and social study* (London, 1993). See also Ethan Shagan, *Catholics and the ‘Protestant nation’: religious politics and identity in early modern England* (Manchester, 2005).

Rousseau's eagle were thus to be reunited within a Christian commonwealth. The sacred and secular were to be reconciled as the modern Elijah would slay the priests of Baal and the Christian became the patriot.

The intellectual resources of Hanoverian civil religion

Hanoverian theorists of civil religion believed themselves to be completing the long history of Christian Reform to return the faith back to its primitive perfection. In the beginning, they argued, there was the apostolic purity of the primitive church. Error and corruption emerged as Christianity became established in the world. The emergence of Christianity as the official religion of imperial Rome under Constantine gave civil sanction to the theological wrongs of corrupt Christianity, which were confirmed by the early church councils. These included the superstitions of late Roman paganism and the metaphysical wrangling produced by the fusion of Christian theology with Greek philosophy. In the language of Edward Gibbon in *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), Arius and Athanasius burdened the world with their quarrel about a diphthong. The history of Christian Reform was one of multiple attempts to beat back the corruptions of popery and the temporal usurpations of the bishop of Rome. English civil religionists were fond of drawing historical precedents for their ecclesiology. They referred to the investiture controversy during the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the rivalries between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, which lasted for three subsequent centuries.¹⁵ The influence of Marsilius of Padua on early modern English Protestant ecclesiology is well documented; he remained popular during the eighteenth century for resisting the fourteenth-century papacy with Philip the Fair.¹⁶

A key legacy of medieval and early modern Christian Reform was Erastianism. Broadly, Erastianism signified subjecting priestly power to the secular civil magistrate. Thomas Erastus was a sixteenth-century Zwinglian theologian in Switzerland, who argued in Heidelberg against excessive powers of excommunication. His opposition was to the use of excommunication against an entire polity. He never argued for subjecting the church entirely to the secular power.¹⁷ But in Britain, during the 1640s, especially at the Westminster

¹⁵ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The investiture controversy: church and monarchy from the ninth to the twelfth century* (Philadelphia, 1988).

¹⁶ W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, 'The source of Hooker's knowledge of Marsilius of Padua', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 25:1 (1974), 75-81; Shelley Lockwood, 'Marsilius of Padua and the case for the royal ecclesiastical supremacy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), 89-119; Bettina Koch, 'Priestly despotism: the problem of unruly clerics in Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor pacis*', *Journal of religious history*, 36:2 (2012), 165-83.

¹⁷ Charles D. Gunnoe, *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate: a Renaissance physician in the second Reformation* (Leiden, 2010).

Assembly (1643), the term ‘Erastian’ took a broader meaning and it was thus bequeathed to the Restoration.¹⁸ In writing histories of England and Scotland, theorists of civil religion balked at the power of superstition over secular rulers. The images of Henry IV, king of the Germans, on the road to Canossa to bow in the snow before the pope and the whipping of Henry II of England following the death of Archbishop Thomas Becket loomed large during the eighteenth century.¹⁹

Hanoverian civil religionists drew from other anti-papalist precedents, especially Paolo Sarpi of the Venetian republic. Sarpi’s *History of the council of Trent*, which was published posthumously in England in 1619, defended temporal sovereignty by attacking the Constantinean inheritance on Christian primitivist grounds and assaulting scholasticism, monasticism, religious persecution, and doctrinal intolerance.²⁰ Sarpi also penned an attack on the papal interdict of Venice (1606-7), his *History of the interdict*, with which engaged French Gallicans and English Reformers. Three English translations of his *History of the inquisition*, published posthumously in 1638, appeared over the following forty years. In *A history of benefices*, which was published posthumously and appeared in English in 1736, he used medieval conciliarist texts in defence of secular regulation of clerical land ownership.²¹

A further key resource was English scholarship on the laws and ecclesiology of the church-state relationship. A common point of reference was Richard Hooker’s defence of the royal supremacy in *Of the lawes of ecclesiasticall politie* (1593-1662), especially his claim in the eighth book that ‘within this *Realm of England*... one society is both the *Church* and *Commonwealth*’.²² Another was John Selden’s argument in his *History of tithes* (1618) that tithing was a *jure humano* practice.²³

Moreover, the tools of spiritual reform on which drew eighteenth-century thinkers stretched back into the 1530s. Concepts of civil religion in England invariably relied upon the

¹⁸ J. N. Figgis, ‘Erastus and Erastianism’, *Journal of theological studies*, 2 (1901), 66-101; Jeffrey R. Collins, ‘The Restoration bishops and the royal supremacy’, *Church history*, 68:3 (1999), 549-80; William M. Abbott, ‘Anticlericalism and episcopacy in parliamentary debates, 1640-1641: secular versus spiritual functions’, in *Law and authority in early modern England*, eds. Buchanan Sharp and Mark Fissel (Newark, 2007), 147-85; Marco Barducci, ‘Clement Barksdale, translator of Grotius: Erastianism and episcopacy in the English church, 1651-1658’, *The seventeenth century*, 25:2 (2010), 265-80.

¹⁹ The image of the road to Canossa was conjured by Otto von Bismarck during his *Kulturkampf* with Pope Pius IX. See Nicholas Hope, ‘Prussian Protestantism’, in *Modern Prussian history, 1830-1947*, ed. Philip G. Dwyer (London and New York, 2001), 188-208.

²⁰ David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

²¹ J. L. Livesay, *Venetian phoenix: Paolo Sarpi and some of his English friends* (Lawrence, 1973); W. J. Bouwsma, ‘Venice and the political education of Europe’, in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John R. Hale (London, 1973), 445-66.

²² Richard Hooker, *Of the laws of ecclesiastical polity*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2013), III, p. 196. See also W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker’s doctrine of the royal supremacy* (Leiden, 1990).

²³ Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England’s chief rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford, 2006).

idea of the godly prince. During the early Reformation, the royal supremacy had been defended by the claim that the *imperator* was sovereign over the Christian commonwealth and its church. The English monarchy defined itself by the image of Constantine as the Roman emperor who established Christianity. The closed imperial crown symbolised the Constantinean model as the king held both the sword and book.²⁴ The English monarch deployed temporal power to reverse the usurpations of the corrupt papacy and, by magisterial authority, returned the keys of heaven to the priesthood of all believers in the face of Petrine imitators. He defended the true faith by governing the visible church. Thus, in the eschatological iconography of John Foxe's *Actes and monuments* (1563), better known as *Foxe's book of martyrs*, appeared the Constantinean Henry VIII.²⁵ Similarly, the supreme governorship of Elizabeth I was symbolised by repeated images of the pope or the papal tiara on the floor beneath the monarch.²⁶ During the Restoration, Constantine remained the exemplification of the royal supremacy as the Church of England sought to move on from the chaos of the Interregnum.²⁷

But Constantine could also be read as a quisling of episcopal power. Uncivil priests were modern imitators of Athanasius and his ilk whose priestcraft, creeds, and doctrines during the council of Nicaea (AD 325) had so captivated Constantine. Histories of godly and ungodly kingship abounded during the eighteenth century. Constantine stood as an ambivalent figure. The history of the seventeenth-century wars of religion was the latest drama of the threat of popery. Whether it was James I at the Hampton Court Conference (1604), the power of Archbishop William Laud over Charles I, or Charles II at the Savoy Conference (1661), civil religionists were painfully aware of the weakness of even Protestant kings in the face of priestcraft. Marsilian and Hookerian histories of the Christian church set the yardstick against which to measure the godliness of England's princes.²⁸ Having delivered England from the dark grips of popery, William III had been hailed by whigs like

²⁴ Patrick Collinson, *The birthpangs of Protestant England: religious and cultural change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 130-2; John N. King, 'The royal image, 1535-1603', in *Tudor political culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 104-7, 114, 129.

²⁵ William Haller, *Foxe's book of martyrs and the elect nation* (London, 1963). Haller was challenged by Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the Reformation to the eve of the Civil War* (Toronto, 1978) and Katherine Firth, *The apocalyptic tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford, 1979).

²⁶ Patrick Collinson, 'If Constantine, then also Theodosius: St Ambrose and the integrity of the Elizabethan *ecclesia Anglicana*', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 30:2 (1979), 205-29.

²⁷ Jacqueline Rose, *Godly kingship in Restoration England: the politics of the royal supremacy, 1660-1688* (Cambridge, 2011).

²⁸ Mark Goldie, 'Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism'; 'Toleration and the godly prince in Restoration England', in *Liberty, authority, formality: political ideas and culture, 1600-1900*, eds. John Morrow and Jonathan Scott (Exeter, 2008), 45-66.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, as her latest godly prince. Whigs would use the idea to justify the Hanoverian succession in 1714 as a project of domestic moral reform and a larger brotherhood of European Protestantism against Bourbon France.²⁹ Despite the alliance between William III and Austria, the fear of a powerful alliance of the European Roman Catholic powers helped form the image of the magisterial state as a bastion of true religion. Gilbert Burnet, Williamite bishop of Salisbury, thus offered patronage to clergymen who believed in ‘mid-Tudor ideals’ of ‘godly magistracy and moral reform’.³⁰

Civil religion in eighteenth-century Britain was therefore a product of the process now known as the ‘long Reformation’. Historians have explored the long Reformation in terms of the conversion of the nation to the true faith by catechism, popular piety, the reformation of manners, and godly rule.³¹ Yet the development of the eighteenth-century state continued the struggles of previous centuries; it cannot be understood without appreciation of ecclesiastical history between 1530 and 1689. It was the history of the battle of *imperium* in which *regnum* was pitted against *sacerdotium*. The concern with *praemunire*, or clerical subversion of secular power, remained dominant. To secularise eighteenth-century political thought by supposing that the sixteenth-century Reformation resulted in the breaking of the walls of the church is to misrepresent it. It would be wise to recall Duncan Forbes’s warning against ‘the fallacy of premature secularisation’.³² The legitimacy of rulership turned at least in part on its godliness and the church became an institution of the civil state. The priestly state with its uncivil religion was to fall to the civil state of the evangelical prince and pious patriot. Sanctity lay in the political relationships of the civil community and not the false gods of popery, be they the pope himself, idolatrous objects or superstitious doctrines. In the words of

²⁹ Hannah Smith, *Georgian monarchy: politics and culture, 1714-1760* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 19-58.

³⁰ Tony Claydon, *William III and the godly revolution* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 159, 231-2. See also Warren Johnston, ‘Revelation and the Revolution of 1688-1689’, *Historical journal*, 48:2 (2005), 351-89.

³¹ Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England’s long Reformation, 1500-1800* (London, 1998). John Spurr, however, has preferred to call the seventeenth century a ‘post-Reformation’ period. See *The post-Reformation: religion, politics and society in Britain, 1603-1714* (Harlow, 2006). See also John Bossy, *Christianity in the west, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985); Jonathan Barry, ‘Bristol as a “Reformation city”, c. 1640-1780’, in *England’s long Reformation*, ed. Tyacke, 261-84; Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: catechisms and catechizing in England, c.1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996); *Print and Protestantism in early modern England* (Oxford, 2001); Jeremy Gregory, ‘The eighteenth-century Reformation: the pastoral task of the Anglican clergy after 1689’, in *The Church of England, c. 1689 – c. 1833: from toleration to Tractarianism*, eds. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge, 1993), 67-85; ‘The making of a Protestant nation: “success” and “failure” in England’s long Reformation’, in *England’s long Reformation*, ed. Tyacke, 307-33; *Restoration, Reformation and Reform: archbishops of Canterbury and their diocese* (Oxford, 2000); Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable hatred: tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester, 2006); Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, reform and modernity in the eighteenth century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England* (Woodbridge, 2007); Sarah Apetrei, *Women, feminism and religion in early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge, 2010).

³² Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s philosophical politics* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 41. See also Owen Chadwick, *The secularization of the European mind in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1975).

Robert Molesworth in *An account of Denmark* (1694), ‘the Character of Priest [would] give place to that of true *Patriot*’.³³

Theorists of civil religion were secularising the state insofar as they buttressed the sanctity of the civil magistrate. Despite the claim of Rousseau that Hobbes had failed to generate a civil religion, this was the process to which Hobbes contributed in *Leviathan*.³⁴ Hobbes insisted that the civil sovereign was the highest priest and the ministers of the established church were the sovereign’s servants. Hobbes condemned the three ‘knots’ that had strangled the liberty of the true Christian: popery, prelacy, and presbytery. The Reformation had begun to untie these knots to restore Christians to ‘the Independency of the Primitive Christians’ which was ‘perhaps the best’.³⁵ Hobbes’s *Leviathan* thereby adapted Protestant eschatology for civil ends.³⁶

The history of Christian Reform also converged with the classicising disposition of the eighteenth century. The idea of a sovereign Christian *imperator* was itself rooted in Roman law and it was a standard move of English Protestantism against the pope posing as *dominus mundi*. Precedents for the right relationship between church and state were found in ancient Rome, whose civil religion, at least before it had degenerated into popular superstition, had been a religion of the pious patriot. A popular choice was the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, who had devised the Roman religion following the death of Romulus.³⁷ But by far the most important figure was Marcus Tullius Cicero. In *De natura deorum* (BC 45), Cicero had analysed pagan Roman religion in Epicurean and Stoic terms. He concluded that *superstitio* signified doctrines and formalities designed in ‘groundless fear of the gods’. However, *religio* was the form of devotion which resulted from true piety and love of the gods. *Religio* signified the virtuous republic at prayer, ‘piously worshipping’ the gods, while *superstitio* represented its corruption.³⁸

The construction of the right church-state relationship was, however, not quite so simple. England’s magisterial Reformation had been deeply ambiguous from the outset. As J.

³³ Robert Molesworth, *An account of Denmark, with Francogallia and some considerations for the promoting of agriculture and employing the poor*, ed. Justin Champion (Indianapolis, 2011), p. 14.

³⁴ Tuck, ‘Christian atheism’; ‘Civil religion of Thomas Hobbes’; Sarah Mortimer, ‘Christianity and civil religion in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*’, in *The Oxford handbook of Hobbes*, eds. Al P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra (Oxford, 2016), 501-19.

³⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, revised edn (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 479-80.

³⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Time, history, and eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes’, in *Politics, language, and time: essays on political thought and history* (Chicago and London, 1981), 148-201.

³⁷ V. A. Kahn, *Machiavellian rhetoric: from the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 54-9; Mark Silk, ‘Numa Pompilius and the idea of civil religion in the west’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72:4 (2004), 863-96.

³⁸ Cicero, *De natura deorum; academica*, trans. H. Rackham (London and Cambridge, MA, 1933), p. 113.

G. A. Pocock has written, 'it is in the consequences of Henry VIII's Reformation that we find the enduring problematic of English political thought for the next three centuries'.³⁹ On one level, the reforms of the 1530s might have placed the church entirely within the remit of the crown alone. The Act of Submission of the Clergy (1534) required Convocation, that is, the governing body of the Church of England, to meet only by royal assent with further permission needed to pass new canon law. Within the remit of the crown was also the power to appoint bishops through a system involving cathedral chapters. The crown seized the fiscal and juridical powers of the papacy. English courts received ecclesiastical appeals while the crown collected clerical 'first fruits and tenths'. Royal injunction would regulate worship, and the crown, by royal commissions, would control religious dissent. Most notoriously, the dissolution of the monasteries was by royal command.

Yet the crown was not the only agent in the Reformation. In 1533 the Act in Restraint of Appeals provided a legal formulation of English sovereignty by declaring England an empire with absolute jurisdiction over itself in temporal and spiritual affairs. But the meaning of the term 'empire' was vague: either the imperial crown symbolised royal authority over the church and the origins of that authority derived from within the church or it was the crown-in-parliament that governed the church according to the laws and customs of the realm.⁴⁰ The legacy of the magisterial Reformation was ambiguous and still contested as late as the eighteenth century because Anglican ecclesiology continued to render unclear the relationship between the monarchy, parliament, episcopacy, clergy, and laity.⁴¹

During the Restoration, a series of ecclesiological debates turned upon these unclear relationships. By now the established church was governed by the series of laws known as the 'Clarendon code', which aimed to secure the ascendancy of the Church of England and discourage Protestant Nonconformity. The Corporation Act (1661) restricted civil office to Anglicans. The Act of Uniformity (1662) restored the *Book of common prayer* (1549). It legislated for the rites, gestures, and ceremonies, including kneeling to take communion, signing the cross during baptism, and clergymen wearing the surplice, approved under Elizabeth I. It concluded the 'great ejection', between 1660 and 1662, of 2,000 puritan ministers and university dons who refused to give their assent to the prayer book. All clergymen were required to receive ordination from their bishops and repudiate the Solemn

³⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, 'A discourse of sovereignty: observations on the work in progress', in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Phillipson and Skinner, p. 381.

⁴⁰ John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 132-4, 369-78.

⁴¹ For the politics of the church-state relationship in the Restoration as a distinct phase of the long Reformation in England, see Rose, *Godly kingship*, pp. 2-25.

League and Covenant (1643). The Conventicle Act (1664 and renewed in 1670) imposed penalties for those attending or allowing Nonconformist congregations on their premises. The Five Mile Act (1665) attempted to force Dissenters from towns where they had ministered congregations. It forbade them to teach and to host lodgers. The Test Act (1673) restricted military and civil office only to those who took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, renounced the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, and received communion by the rites of the Church of England. From 1678, its terms also applied to parliament.

These laws were passed by the crown-in-parliament. But when Charles II and James II issued declarations of indulgence in 1672 and 1687 to suspend the penal laws on Protestant Nonconformists and Roman Catholics by royal prerogative, a persecuting Anglican parliament found itself in a quandary. Either it could defend the Clarendon code in defiance of the crown or it could undermine the relationship between the king-in-parliament and the established church. The royal supremacy that had been designed to reinforce the establishment seemed now to be undermining it. Whigs and Protestant Dissenters might also choose to hail the godly prince acting independently of an unchristian parliament.⁴² This was the argument of Andrew Marvell and the Shaftesburean *Letter from a person of quality to his friend in the country* (1675).⁴³ The fall of James II owed partly to the perception that he was undermining his own sovereignty over the church.⁴⁴ The Toleration Act (1689) finally provided relief for trinitarian Dissenters. Crucially, it was called ‘An act exempting his majesties Protestant subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws’. It was more a statute of indulgence carried out by the crown-in-parliament than a toleration act, since it merely suspended penal laws rather than reforming or repealing them.

There were further ambiguities in the magisterial state. The promise of godly kingship had been that the monarch would defend the exclusive relationship between the lay believer and God. This was rooted in Protestant soteriology, which, at the very least, downgraded the role of the Christian minister in saving souls. The role of the public officeholders of the national church was deeply unclear. The debate turned upon two key positions. First, the idea that the church was a holy catholic order which comprised an apostolic clergy whose authority was *jure divino* and had been inherited directly from Christ himself. The church-state relationship, by this reading, was an alliance between two distinct societies. Second, the

⁴² See Goldie, ‘Toleration and the godly prince’.

⁴³ Andrew Marvell, *The rehearsal transpos’d* (London, 1672), p. 162; anon., *A letter from a person of quality, to his friend in the country* (London, 1675), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴ Mark Goldie, ‘The political thought of the Anglican Revolution’, in *The Revolutions of 1688*, ed. Robert Beddard (Oxford, 1991), 102-36.

idea that the church was merely an earthly society, entirely dependent upon human authority, established and governed by the magistrate. Either the supreme governor in or out of parliament or the bishops and clergymen were sovereign over the national church. This tension had origins in the Henrician Reformation itself. Whereas the Act of Appeals implied an alliance between separate temporal and spiritual societies, the Act of Submission of the Clergy placed the government and the legislation of the church establishment under the monarch-in-parliament. These were the legal precedents to which competing Restoration divines appealed while debating the nature of the magisterial church-state relationship.⁴⁵

In the aftermath of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688-9, tory high-churchmen defended the idea of an apostolic church as a distinct society. As Dr Henry Sacheverell, a fiery Oxford don whose sermonising provoked riots in 1709-10, wrote: ‘The *Civil* and *Ecclesiastical* State are the Two Parts and Divisions, that Both United make up One entire compounded Constitution, and Body Politick, sharing the same Fate and Circumstances, Twisted and Interwoven into the very Being and Principles of each Other.’⁴⁶ For Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, it was whiggish bishops who undermined the sacral status of the Church of England by accepting ‘the boundless authority of sovereigns in Church-matters’.⁴⁷ Convocation was ‘as much a part of the constitution as a parliament itself’.⁴⁸

Tory high-churchmanship confronted the ecclesiology of whig low-churchmanship. One such example, though not necessarily representative of all whig ecclesiology, was Matthew Tindal, who argued in his *Rights of the Christian church* (1706) that the legal framework of the magisterial Reformation showed that Queen Anne had ‘no power in Ecclesiasticals except by the Laws of the Land, and can’t divest her self of any part of it without Consent of our Parliament’.⁴⁹ It was by the laws and usages of the realm, not the canon law of an independent Convocation, that the Church of England was governed. Tindal’s whiggish defence of the church as an earthly society established by the crown-in-parliament was comparable with other such defences during the party wars of the early Hanoverian age, including those of Shaftesbury, John Trenchard, and Thomas Gordon.

⁴⁵ Collins, ‘Restoration bishops’. See also Mark Goldie, ‘The nonjurors, episcopacy, and the origins of the Convocation controversy’, in *Ideology and conspiracy: aspects of Jacobitism, 1689-1759*, ed. Eveline Cruickshanks (Edinburgh, 1982), 15-35.

⁴⁶ Henry Sacheverell, *The political union* (London, 1702), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Francis Atterbury, *The rights, powers, and privileges of an English Convocation* (London, 1700), sig. A6r, p. 148.

⁴⁸ Francis Atterbury, *A letter to a convocation-man, concerning the rights, powers and privileges of that body* (London, 1697), p. 50.

⁴⁹ Matthew Tindal, *Rights of the Christian church* (London, 1706), pp. ix, lxxxi.

The advent of Williamite *jure humano* bishops like John Tillotson, archbishop of Canterbury, and Edward Stillingfleet, bishop of Worcester, during the 1690s provoked *juro divino* ecclesiology into a rear-guard action.⁵⁰ At one extreme stood Atterbury and Sacheverell.⁵¹ But for whig low-churchmen like Benjamin Hoadly, bishop of Bangor, Christ's kingdom was not of this world. The church was a human institution and the authority of its clergymen was derived purely from the sovereign secular state. Christ had handed the keys of heaven not to a superior clerical caste but to the priesthood of all believers.⁵² These tensions in the question of the authority of clergymen shaped variant forms of Hanoverian civil religion. Lay thinkers tended to demote Christian priests to ministers appointed by the human hands of the secular state. Such thinkers included Shaftesbury, Trenchard, Gordon, David Hume, Gibbon, and Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke. It included clergymen like Conyers Middleton, Edmund Law, bishop of Carlisle, and Francis Blackburne, archdeacon of Cleveland. By contrast, other eighteenth-century churchmen who engaged with civil religion defended the sacerdotal status of Christian ministers within the Church of England while conceding the supremacy of the secular civil magistrate. These included Edmund Gibson, bishop of Lincoln and then London, and William Warburton, bishop of Gloucester.

Learned ministers and pastoral clergymen

The long Reformation was also the context in which theorists of civil religion developed a positive vision for Christian ministry. Molesworth believed the central insight of republics was that they 'keep their *Ecclesiasticks* within their due bounds, and... curb those, who if they had Power would curb all the World'.⁵³ But the ecclesiastics, however restricted, were still there. Although whig and Enlightened religion in Britain could have strongly anticlerical moods, it would be more accurate to describe such ecclesiology as mainly anti-sacerdotal. While some theorists of civil religion believed that clergymen retained a sacerdotal character, most did not agree that they enjoyed a privileged mediating position between God and the laity. In any event, clergymen still had a vital place in the civil state and civilised society. That the works of Locke, Shaftesbury, John Toland, and Anthony Collins were read and reprinted by French *philosophes* partly because of their anti-sacerdotalism should not be a reason to ignore the positive arguments they made for Christian ministry.

⁵⁰ For Tillotson and Stillingfleet, see Rose, *Godly kingship*, pp. 141-228.

⁵¹ Geoffrey Holmes, *The trial of Dr Sacheverell* (London, 1973); G. V. Bennett, *The tory crisis in church and state: the career of Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 103-12.

⁵² Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian controversy* (Oxford, 2007).

⁵³ Molesworth, *Account of Denmark*, p. 18.

The idea of the learned Christian minister was a crucial aspect of civil religion. The simple morality of the true faith could only be discovered by means of *sola scriptura* study of the gospels. History and theology were weapons in a war about the ecclesiological character and political status of the church. It was the responsibility of clergymen to study the history of scripture to identify and purge the corrupt accretions which had attached themselves to worship since the days of the early church. Superstitious priests generated false doctrines by such corrupt means as scholasticism to subvert morality for their worldly gain. Learned ministers were to resist the superstition that was a product of priestly imposture and a cause of religious persecution. Theirs was the simple and reasonable religion of the gospel.

The attitude of English civil religion to scripture was Erasmian and, more broadly, humanist. Its English hero was the mid-seventeenth-century Oxonian scholar William Chillingworth. It took to heart Chillingworth's claim that 'the Bible, I say the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants'. It was a 'vain conceit, that we can speak of the things of God better than in the words of God'. This 'deifying our own interpretations, and tyrannous enforcing them upon others' betrayed 'that latitude and generality, and the understandings of men from that liberality, wherein Christ and the Apostles left them'.⁵⁴ It followed the philological instruction of John 5:39 to search the scriptures. Reason and critical enquiry were brought to bear on the claims and authorship of scripture, which was, therefore, studied on similar terms as classical texts. The study of classical and scriptural languages was considered crucial for the contexts in which scripture was composed and the history of its subsequent corruption. Pious divines were to learn the arts of rhetoric and erudition in their sermonising and devotional literature. Religious knowledge was not simply valuable in and of itself but it was also to be made useful for the lay believer.

The battles between Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Nonconformity throughout the long Reformation also lent urgency to the idea of learned Anglican ministry. For instance, John Goodwin of St Stephen's, Coleman Street, was a congregationalist divine whose humanism, Arminianism, and commitment to toleration and free inquiry showed that puritanism could threaten the learned hegemony of the Church of England.⁵⁵ No seventeenth-century Presbyterian would have welcomed being called a Nonconformist precisely because Presbyterians defended the idea of a national church. Richard Baxter conceived of a national

⁵⁴ William Chillingworth, 'The religion of the Protestants' (1637), in *The works of William Chillingworth*, 10th edn (London, 1742), pp. 354, 203. See also Robert Orr, *Reason and authority: the thought of William Chillingworth* (Oxford, 1967).

⁵⁵ John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the puritan revolution: religion and intellectual change in seventeenth-century England* (Woodbridge, 2006).

establishment in which ‘Learned, judicious, Godly, able faithful men’ were ‘provided with their daily bread for food or raiment’. Learned ministers would ‘manage God’s word’ and ‘inform the people’.⁵⁶ Sometimes whig theorists of civil religion like Shaftesbury, especially during the partisan battles which followed the Revolution, were accused of weakness in the face of rebellious Presbyterians and puritans. But whig civil religionists were trying to wrest back ground colonised by Presbyterians, especially, for the Anglican establishment.

Concern about the universities was a corollary of learned ministry. The universities remained seminaries for Anglican clergymen. The caricature was that Oxford and Cambridge were still cells for backward scholastics concerned with the Platonic metaphysics and Aristotelian logic that had corrupted Christianity during the church councils. Civil religionists castigated the study of patristics.⁵⁷ Cynicism about the priestly pettifogging of the universities had led to the grand tour as an alternative to a university education.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Cambridge, which produced such theorists of civil religion as Blackburne and Law, was more reliably whig.⁵⁹ Oxford, where suffered the young Shaftesbury and languished the indolent Gibbon, was suspected of high-churchmanship and Jacobite disloyalty.⁶⁰ Reform remained an important goal of whig anticlericalism throughout the eighteenth century.⁶¹ While many theorists of civil religion, whether whig or tory, feared Protestant Dissent as the modern version of the enthusiasm that had plunged Britain into the seventeenth-century wars of religion, Dissenters generated their own civil religion. Such men as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price thus defended Dissenting academies as seminaries for learned ministers.

Clergymen were also to be pastors for their parochial flocks. On one level, clergymen were a crucial part of the governance of the parish commonwealth. They oversaw the religious life of the individual. They preached, ministered, baptised, married, and buried their flocks. They chaired the parish vestry. They helped maintain charities, parochial boundaries, roads, bridges, and churches. They received their funds by tithes and dues on the produce of the land and the labour of their flocks. But, on a deeper level, clerical pastoralism, much like

⁵⁶ Richard Baxter, *A holy commonwealth, or political aphorisms, opening the true principles of government* (London, 1659), pp. 241-2.

⁵⁷ On the reception of patristics in the Church of England, see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford, 2009).

⁵⁸ Jeremy Black, *The British and the grand tour* (London, 1985), p. 189.

⁵⁹ John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment: science, religion and politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁶⁰ J. W. Yolton, ‘Schoolmen, logic and philosophy’, in *The history of the University of Oxford: vol. V: the eighteenth century*, eds. L. G. Mitchell and L. S. Sutherland (Oxford, 1986), 565-91.

⁶¹ John Gascoigne, ‘Church and state allied: the failure of parliamentary reform of the universities, 1688-1800’ in *The first modern society: essays in English history in honour of Lawrence Stone*, eds. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and J. M. Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), 401-29.

Protestant ecclesiology, stretched deep into the contested legacy of the long Reformation.⁶² Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Nonconformists produced works on *pastoralia*, godly rule, devotion, moral reformation, and parochial care. The need impressed itself upon Anglicans to retake the ground seized by such Presbyterians as William Prynne and Baxter for godly and tolerant pastoral ministry within the national church.⁶³ Burnet in his *Discourse of the pastoral care* (1692) and Stillingfleet in his *Charge to the clergy of his diocese* (1691) seized the ground. Burnet aimed at ‘the completing of our Reformation, especially as to the lives and manners of men’. Under the protection of princes, earlier Reformers ‘insensibly slackened’ and, relying on legal succour, ‘did not study to reform the lives and manners of their people’. Ministers must engage in ‘the instructing, the exhorting, the admonishing and reproof, the direction and conducting, the visiting and comforting of the people of the parish’. These functions fell beyond ‘the cognizance of the law’.⁶⁴

The importance of pastoral ministry lay above all in the battle against enthusiasm. If superstition was one enemy of civil religion, enthusiasm was the other. Shaftesbury and Hume exemplified the tendency of civil religionists to defeat both enemies by their efforts to cast superstition with its priestliness and enthusiasm with its frenzy as inversions of true religion. Enthusiasts destabilised civil society by their claim to be inhabited directly by God’s spirit.⁶⁵ Commitment to the principles of freedom of conscience and the vernacular availability of the Bible undermined the integrity of the interpretations of the established church. Sectarians developed theologies with millennial and antinomian tendencies.⁶⁶ Theorists of civil religion like Shaftesbury and Hume referred to a group of French Huguenot refugees, known as the Camisards, who appeared in London during the 1700s. Aside from their apocalyptic ecstasy, the group engaged in the developing free press to denounce the supremacy of rationalism in favour of personal revelation and primitive Christian enthusiasm. Since many of these prophets remained at least initially within the Church of England and

⁶² Eamonn Duffy, ‘The long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism, and the multitude’, in *England’s long Reformation*, ed. Tyacke, pp. 36-7.

⁶³ William Lamont, *Marginal Prynne, 1600-69* (London, 1963); *Godly rule: politics and religion, 1603-60* (London, 1963); *Richard Baxter and the millennium* (London, 1980).

⁶⁴ Gilbert Burnet, *A discourse of the pastoral care*, 3rd edn (London, 1692), sig. A4, pp. xiv-xvi, 184-91, 193-4, 205.

⁶⁵ Michael Heyd, *‘Be sober and reasonable’: the critique of enthusiasm in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries* (Leiden and New York, 1995); J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Enthusiasm: the antiself of Enlightenment’, in *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850*, eds. Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony La Vopa (San Marino, 1998), 7-28.

⁶⁶ Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: a chapter in the history of religion* (Notre Dame, 1950); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (London, 1971), p. 141; Warren Johnston, *Revelation restored: the apocalypse in later seventeenth-century England* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, 2011).

continued to appeal to Anglicans to create a universal church, Lionel Laborie has rightly concluded that they can be classified neither as sectarians nor dissenters. They showed the potential for enthusiasm within the religious establishment in an age before Methodism.⁶⁷

Civil religionists defended the Church of England as a *via media* between the superstitious priestcraft of the Church of Rome and the frenzied enthusiasm of the Protestant sects. The outward worship of the Christian commonwealth celebrated this *via media*. Sermons on 30 January commemorated the execution of Charles I to remind the laity of the dangers of enthusiasm. On 5 November, clergymen celebrated the demise of Roman Catholicism by the failure of the gunpowder plot. Instead of the puritan emphasis on grace or the priestly insistence on doctrine, soteriological weight was now to be placed on practical devotion. As Jeremy Gregory has shown, one of the challenges facing the Church of England after the Revolution of 1688-9 was the need to monopolise the contested legacy of clerical pastoralism. Anglican clergymen and evangelical revivalists consciously deployed the same terminology as sixteenth-century English Reformers.⁶⁸ By marrying gospel precepts with pastoral care, the Church of England might generate polite and tolerant religion without leaving the laity recourse to ‘mechanic preachers’. In the towns, especially London, where Dissenting interests flourished in the context of mercantile trade, had developed a marketplace in ‘conventicling’ and sermonising. The need to counteract ‘sermon-gadding’ priests became a challenge for the establishment. In all these contexts, the challenge of pastoralism was one to which theorists of civil religion developed a response.

A religion of politeness, sociability, and latitude

By their emphasis on practical devotion, theorists of civil religion were attempting to create a religion of politeness, sociability, and latitude. In the public sphere, polite religion was a feature of debate in the periodicals and coffeehouses.⁶⁹ The urban world of the commercial centre complemented the rational religion preached at the pulpit as a means of inculcating virtue and devotion. Superstition and enthusiasm were to be subjected not to the fiery damnations of the sanctimonious prelate but the good-humoured ridicule of the witty gentleman.⁷⁰ The censorial public were agents in the generation of civil religion in the literary

⁶⁷ Lionel Laborie, *Enlightening enthusiasm: prophecy and religious experience in early eighteenth-century England* (Manchester, 2015).

⁶⁸ Gregory, ‘The eighteenth-century Reformation’.

⁶⁹ Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Politics and politeness in the reigns of Anne and the early Hanoverians’, in *The varieties of British political thought, 1500-1800*, eds. J. G. A. Pocock with Gordon Schochet and Lois Schwoerer (Cambridge, 1996), 229-35.

⁷⁰ Joseph M. Levine, *The battle of the books: history and literature in the Augustan age* (Ithaca, 1991).

universe of *The Spectator* (1711-12) of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.⁷¹ Religious belief and political practice would be subjected to the culture of sociability. In the spirit of *doux commerce*, trade and commercial exchange were solvents of religious conflict as religion was put to the service of worldly civilisation.⁷²

The Church of England was, therefore, an institution of civil society. Civil religionists encouraged the voluntary aspects of pious devotion in the context of charitable service.⁷³ Especially in the aftermath of the Revolution and during the partisan conflicts of the early eighteenth century, thinkers like Shaftesbury, Trenchard, and Gordon accused high-church Anglicans of dogmatism and ceremonialism. Good works were to replace controversial tracts and the traditional disciplinary structures of the Church of England.⁷⁴ These developments in Anglican culture expressed themselves in such new organisations as the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The SPCK, encouraged especially by Gibson, harnessed a message of Christian primitivism in the face of tory high-churchmanship, which itself sought to model its sacerdotal priestliness on gospel principles, and sought Christian renewal in charity schools, ministry, literature, and catechism. The goal of civil religion was a godly nation at prayer and one defended by its church establishment against enthusiasm.⁷⁵

However, some organisations were controversial. The involvement of Dissenters in the religious societies for the reformation of manners left these groups open to the charge from high-church Tories that low-church Whigs risked endangering the Church of England by their latitude.⁷⁶ As Sacheverell argued in *The character of a low churchman* (1702), the Church needed to return to its ‘ancient, primitive discipline’ to secure its flocks ‘from vice and immorality, schism and heresy’. It should not rely on ‘a society for the reformation of manners, wherein every tradesman and mechanic is to take upon himself the gift of the Spirit, and to expound the difficult passages of Scripture, and every justice of the peace is allowed to

⁷¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Cambridge, MA [1962] 1989).

⁷² A. O. Hirschmann, *The passions and the interests: political arguments for capitalism before its triumph* (Princeton, 1977).

⁷³ Brent S. Sirota, *The Christian monitors: the Church of England in the age of benevolence, 1680-1730* (New Haven and London, 2014).

⁷⁴ Edward Alan Bloom and Lilly D. Bloom, *Joseph Addison's sociable animal: in the marketplace, on the hustings, in the pulpit* (Providence, 1971), pp. 151-202.

⁷⁵ Eamonn Duffy, ‘Primitive Christianity revived: religious renewal in Augustan England’, in *Renaissance and renewal in Christian history*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1977), 287-300; ‘Correspondence fraternelle: the SPCK, the SPG and the churches of Switzerland in the War of the Spanish Succession’, in *Reform and Reformation in England and the continent, c.1500-c.1750*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1979), 251-80; ‘The SPCK and Europe’, *Pietismus und Neuzeit*, 7 (1981), 28-42; David Hayton, ‘Moral reform and country politics in the late-seventeenth-century House of Commons’, *Past & present*, 128:1 (1990), 48-89; Craig Rose, ‘The origins of the SPCK, 1699-1716’, in *Church of England*, eds. Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, 172-90.

⁷⁶ A. G. Craig, ‘The movement for the reformation of manners, 1688-1715’, unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 1980).

settle its canons and infallibly decide what is orthodox and heretical'. The SPCK was a 'mongrel institution' that aimed to 'insinuate an insufficiency in the Church's discipline' and 'betray its power into the hands of a lay-eldership and fanaticism'.⁷⁷ The development of Anglican voluntarism represented a riposte to the tory high-church view that godly rule was best served by a revival of church-based institutions of discipline such as ecclesiastical courts. It was not simply that the ecclesiastical courts had been in rapid decline since the Revolution but also that Anglican high-churchmen developed the long anti-puritan tradition of mistrusting religious activity outside the formal structures of the church. Whereas tory high-churchmen tended to suspect enthusiastic conventicling wherever Christians worshipped and performed works without the guidance of Anglican priests, whig churchmen like Gibson placed their faith in the voluntary capacity of Christians in civil society.⁷⁸

During the eighteenth century, theorists of civil religion also emphasised latitude as a means of rendering the Church of England truly a national church of the Christian commonwealth. However, the term 'latitude' must be understood carefully. Historians are tempted to trace a tradition of 'liberal' and 'rationalist' divinity from seventeenth-century England into the Enlightenment. This tradition supposedly encompassed 'Cambridge Platonists', including Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, and 'latitudinarians' during the seventeenth century through to deists and freethinkers during the eighteenth century. This argument first took hold during the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ The idea that there was a distinct group of 'latitudinarian' Anglican clergymen in Restoration England has also gained currency among recent historians.⁸⁰ But, as John Spurr has shown, the term

⁷⁷ Henry Sacheverell, *The character of a low churchman* (London, 1702), pp. 10-12.

⁷⁸ Tina Isaacs, 'The Anglican hierarchy and the reformation of manners, 1688-1738', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 33:3 (1982), 391-411; John Spurr, 'The Church, the societies, and the moral revolution of 1688', in *Church of England*, eds. Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, 127-42.

⁷⁹ Scott Mandelbrote, 'Biblical hermeneutics and the sciences, 1700-1900: an overview', in *Nature and scripture in the Abrahamic religions*, eds. Scott Mandelbrote and Jitse van der Meer, 4 vols. (Leiden, 2008), II, 3-40. The argument was variously put by Mark Pattison, 'Tendencies of religious thought in England, 1688-1750', in *Essays and reviews*, eds. Frederick Temple et al. (London, 1860), 254-329; John Tulloch, *Rational theology and Christian philosophy in England in the seventeenth century*, 2 vols. (London, 1874), I, pp. 411-62; Leslie Stephen, *History of English thought in the eighteenth century*, 2 vols. (London, 1881).

⁸⁰ G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to age of reason: a study of changes in religious thought within the Church of England, 1660 to 1700* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 61-86; Norman Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker: aspects of English church history, 1660-1768* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 148-52; Henry McAdoo, *The spirit of Anglicanism: a survey of Anglican theological method in the seventeenth century* (London, 1965), pp. 81-315; Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986), p. 33; Rivers, *Reason, grace, and sentiment*, I, pp. 25-88; Martin Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the seventeenth-century Church of England* (Leiden, 1992); W. M. Spellman, *The latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens, GA, 1993); F. C. Beiser, *The sovereignty of reason: the defense of rationality in the early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1996); John Coffey, *Religious liberalism in eighteenth century England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 179-82; J. G. A. Pocock, 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment', in *Culture and politics from puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 95-6, 100-2; 'Clergy and commerce: the conservative

‘latitudinarianism’ is largely redundant in describing a self-conscious ecclesiastical grouping or mode of divinity.⁸¹ Those associated with ‘latitudinarianism’ tended to be integrated within the main currents of Restoration Anglican divinity. Further, as Dmitri Levitin has argued, Cambridge Platonists were more accurately a loose collection of scholars connected by standard academic relationships and a commonplace seventeenth-century opposition to Calvinism, whose interests extended far beyond neo-Platonism.⁸²

To use the term ‘latitudinarianism’ in discussing the eighteenth-century Church of England is less controversial.⁸³ To speak of latitude was to invoke the vogue for moderation, following Philippians 4:5, which expressed itself in eirenic tolerance.⁸⁴ The children of God could err and, since there was no divine institution on earth, nobody could reasonably persecute sincere Christians who earnestly searched the scriptures. Hanoverian latitudinarians insisted that a certain set of doctrinal differences were permissible within the Church of England. They conjured a mood comparable with that of Addison’s Mr Spectator, who, while dreaming, imagined himself in the Great Hall of the Bank of England. At the upper end of the hall was the Magna Carta ‘with the Act of Uniformity on the right Hand, and the Act of Toleration on the left’. Later in the dream, Mr Spectator witnessed spectres of discord and images of accord. In front of the latter were ‘Liberty with Monarchy at the right Hand’ and ‘Moderation leading in Religion’.⁸⁵

Enlightenment in England’, in *L’età dei lumi: studi storici sul settecento Europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, ed. R. J. Ajello (Naples, 1985), pp. 530-1, 535, 550-1; ‘Within the margins: the definitions of orthodoxy’, in *The margins of orthodoxy: heterodox writing and cultural response, 1660-1750*, ed. Roger Lund (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 33-5; Justin Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken: the Church of England and its enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 133-69; Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*, pp. 25-69; R. L. Emerson, ‘Latitudinarianism and the English deists’, in *Deism, masonry, and the Enlightenment: essays honoring Alfred Owen Aldridge*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Newark, 1987), pp. 28, 31.

⁸¹ John Spurr, ‘Latitudinarianism and the Restoration church’, *Historical journal*, 31:1 (1988), 61-82; “‘Rational religion” in Restoration England”, *Journal of the history of ideas*, 49:4 (1988), 564-58; *The Restoration Church of England* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 296-311. See also John Marshall, ‘The ecclesiology of the latitude-men, 1660-89: Stillingfleet, Tillotson and “Hobbism”’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 36:3 (1985), 407-27; *John Locke: resistance, religion and responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 39, n. 12; Michael Hunter, ‘Latitudinarianism and the “ideology” of the early Royal Society: Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* (1667) reconsidered’, in *Philosophy, science, and religion in England, 1640–1700*, eds. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), 199–229; Richard Ashcraft, ‘Latitudinarianism and toleration: historical myth versus political reality’, in *ibid.*, 151-77; William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: unity and accord* (London, 2001), pp. 48-61.

⁸² Dmitri Levitin, *Ancient wisdom in the age of the new science: histories of philosophy in England, c. 1640 – 1700* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 13-17.

⁸³ Norman Sykes first referred to ‘the dominance of the Latitudinarian tradition in the Hanoverian Church’. See *Church and state in England in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 268, 283.

⁸⁴ Mark Knights, ‘Occasional conformity and the representation of dissent: hypocrisy, sincerity, moderation and zeal’, *Parliamentary history*, 24:1 (2005), 41-57. For the cult of moderation throughout the Reformation, see Ethan Shagan, *The rule of moderation: violence, religion and the politics of restraint in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁸⁵ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator*, ed. Gregory Smith, 4 vols. (London, 1907), I, pp. 11, 13.

While not necessarily indicating a programme or a party, there were shared eighteenth-century latitudinarian commitments. In its more reformist iterations, as in the cases of Blackburne or Law, it could have comprehensive tendencies by seeking to minimise the national church's doctrines to comprehend all sincere Protestants.⁸⁶ It was adiaphorist in orientation, since its exponents claimed the essentials of Christianity were simple and readily apprehensible; all else was of human creation. It emphasised latitude for tender consciences both within the fold of the establishment and beyond. Its keynotes were charity, practical Christianity, moderation, tolerance, free inquiry, and rationality.⁸⁷ It insisted on the Erasmian and Chillingworthian emphases on *sola scriptura* study of the Bible. It often equated primitive Christianity with natural religion, though this was almost always attended by revelation. It remained ever suspicious of sacerdotalism. These were all the principles, argued Burnet, of a low-churchman.⁸⁸ Low-churchmen 'think no humane constitution is so perfect but that it may be made better'.⁸⁹ Latitudinarian churchmen believed the doctrines of the Church could be purified by clearing them of scholastic, sacerdotal, and superstitious trash. But the impulse to defend a broad-based establishment left them unwilling, between the Bangorian controversy (1717-21) and the subscription controversy of the 1760s and 1770s, to propose reform.⁹⁰

Yet more care is needed in defining the terms 'high-' and 'low-churchman'. It might appear tempting for the modern mind to concur with the great whig historian Thomas Babington Macaulay that the 'blessings which political and intellectual freedom have brought in their train' were the children of 'the great rebellion of the laity against the priesthood'.⁹¹ As William Bulman has intimated, the debate that took place among Anglican churchmen in the aftermath of the seventeenth-century wars of religion was an effort to design civil religion. In this battle, various Anglican divines hoped to reconcile religion with civil peace

⁸⁶ Mark Goldie, 'John Locke, Jonas Proast, and religious toleration, 1688-1689', in *Church of England*, eds. Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, 143-71.

⁸⁷ Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and reason: Anglicans and scripture in late seventeenth-century England* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985); Donald Greene, 'The via media in an age of revolution: Anglicanism in the 18th century', in *The varied pattern: studies in the 18th century* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 312-13.

⁸⁸ Burnet, *Discourse of the pastoral care*, New Preface.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁰ For the ways in which the subscription controversy pressurised Hanoverian latitudinarianism, see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways: a suggestion', in *Church of England*, eds. Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, 209-27.

⁹¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The history of England from the accession of James II* (London, 1848), p. 38. See also W. E. H. Lecky, *A history of England in the 18th century*, 2nd edn, 8 vols. (London, 1879-90), I, pp. 177-81, 187-93; *Democracy and liberty*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London, 1896), I, pp. 434-46, 438, 442; G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England* (London, 1926), pp. 474, 615.

by harnessing erudite scholarship, church history, and pastoral ministry.⁹² There were also sophisticated theological justifications, taken largely from Augustine, for coercion and persecution as legitimate means of Christian ministry, but which balanced them with pastoralism.⁹³ Henry Dodwell developed these themes in opposition to ‘open hostilities against the truth’.⁹⁴ Anglican arguments for intolerance also developed a persecuting adiaphorist argument put by Stillingfleet in *The unreasonableness of separation* (1680) and Samuel Parker, bishop of Oxford, in *A discourse of ecclesiastical politie* (1670). Since many aspects of Christian worship had not been laid down as necessary by Christ, they argued that the secular magistrate could forcibly impose creeds, worship, and ceremonies on hateful schismatics in the interest of godly unity.

The label of Anglican high-churchmanship properly belongs to the post-Revolutionary period. It emerged in the context of the intense ecclesiological disputes that attended the Revolution settlement. The Revolution produced a unique arrangement by which the established church acquiesced to a degree of statutory toleration. The Church of England at once recognised religious pluralism and claimed single jurisdictional authority. Whigs and Tories were debating the most prudent way to handle Protestant Nonconformity by means of learned culture and pastoral care in a project of Christian moral renewal to settle the church-state relationship.⁹⁵ The mainstay of intolerant Anglican clergymen who cautiously accepted the Revolution were neither fully-fledged Jacobites nor convinced nonjurors. They were committed to the dominant ecclesiological views of the Restoration. They conceived of the Church of England as a distinct society, which could not be reduced to be within the secular power, governed by priests empowered by sacerdotal power. They balked at associational and voluntarist Christian revival, favouring traditional forms of ecclesiastical discipline.⁹⁶

The occasional conformity controversy during the 1690s and 1700s resulted in angry charges of ‘the church in danger’. In raising the cry, men like Sacheverell took themselves to be defending the sacral status of the Church of England against those who, they believed, hoped to recast the Church of England as an institution either of the civil state or of civil society. Their defence of the traditional learning of the Church of England was rooted in a

⁹² William J. Bulman, *Anglican Enlightenment: orientalism, religion and politics in England and its empire, 1648-1715* (Cambridge, 2015).

⁹³ Mark Goldie, ‘The theory of religious intolerance in Restoration England’, in *From persecution to toleration: the Glorious Revolution and religion in England*, eds. Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, 1991), 331-68.

⁹⁴ Henry Dodwell, *A reply to Mr Baxter’s pretended confutation* (London, 1681), p. 192.

⁹⁵ Bulman, *Anglican Enlightenment*, pp. 245-76.

⁹⁶ Sirota, *Christian monitors*, pp. 14-17, 23-32.

fear that freethinkers and deists were pillaging patristics and church history for their own irreligious purposes. They were also sensible of the Roman Catholic accusation that Protestants were inherently disunited, and believed that the papacy might take advantage of theological dissension. Tory sloganeering during the general election of 1710 produced the following lines: ‘No Rump Parliament’, ‘No Forty-Eight’, ‘No Presbyterian Rebellion’, and ‘Save the Queen’s White Neck’.⁹⁷

The plight of tory high-churchmanship in Augustan England is that it suffered from history being written by the victors. It was difficult to conceive of the Church of England as a holy catholic society blessed with spiritual autonomy once secular political action had removed its supreme governor during the Revolution. The catholicity of the church was hard to reconcile with the national character of its establishment. Apostolic *jure divino* justifications for priestly authority confronted the magisterial argument that church government sat within the purview of the civil magistrate. If Christ had handed the keys of heaven to the priesthood of all believers, it became increasingly difficult to argue that he had handed the power of discipline to the spiritual rulers of the church. But, as the Tractarian revival and Oxford movement during the nineteenth century demonstrate, there was nothing inevitable about any victory of one mode of divinity against the others.⁹⁸

A key feature of high-churchmen was their willingness to engage with other modes of divinity on such issues as clerical pastoralism and learned ministry. In so doing, they forced eighteenth-century theorists of civil religion onto the same territory. The claims that the church had been a separate society and its priests retained sacerdotal status were central to Warburton’s *The alliance of church and state* (1736) and the arguments of ‘church whigs’ like William Wake, archbishop of Canterbury, and Gibson. A protégé of Thomas Tenison, Williamite archbishop of Canterbury, Gibson published his *Codex juris ecclesiastici Anglicani* in 1713. In this, Gibson examined the rights and duties of Anglican priests as well as the articles, canons, and constitution of the Church of England to show that, while priests retained sacerdotal status, their authority lay under the royal supremacy.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ See, generally, W. A. Speck, *Tory and whig: the struggle in the constituencies, 1701-1715* (London, 1970).

⁹⁸ For nineteenth-century evangelical shades on the eighteenth-century Church of England, see J. H. Overton and F. Relton, *The English church from the accession of George I to the end of the eighteenth century (1714-1800)* (London, 1906), p. 1; C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton, *The English church in the eighteenth century*, 2 vols. (London, 1878), I, pp. 2-3, 29; II, pp. 4, 54. See also Peter Nockles, *The Oxford movement in context* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 44-103; B. W. Young, *The Victorian eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 70-102.

⁹⁹ On Gibson see Norman Sykes, *Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, 1669-1748: a study in politics & religion in the eighteenth century* (London, 1926); Stephen Taylor, “‘Dr. Codex’ and the whig ‘pope’: Edmund Gibson, bishop of Lincoln and London, 1716-1748”, in *Lords of parliament: studies, 1714-1914*, ed. R. W. Davis (Stanford, 1995), 9-28.

To discuss themes of learned and pastoral ministry alongside such questions as voluntarism and latitude is to step firmly into the territory of ecclesiastical history. The eighteenth-century Church of England has repeatedly stood accused of somnolence. During the twentieth century, this accusation was a corollary of the outdated supposition that a decline in religious controversy attended the ‘the growth of political stability’.¹⁰⁰ It was once common to suppose that eighteenth-century Anglican churchmen preferred port and plum pudding over pious principles among the laity. Hogarthian histories, redolent of William Hogarth’s engraving *The sleeping congregation* of 1736 (figure 1), describe the ‘worldliness’ and ‘venality’ of parochial clergy on whose hands ‘time hung heavily’.¹⁰¹ For Roy Porter, ‘the year 1800 dawned with the Anglican Church ill-equipped to serve the nation’. ‘But’, Porter asked, ‘who missed it?’¹⁰²



Figure 1: William Hogarth’s engraving *The sleeping congregation* (1736)

¹⁰⁰ See J. H. Plumb, *The growth of political stability in England, 1675-1725* (London, 1967); J. B. Owen, *The eighteenth century: 1714-1815* (London, 1974); W. A. Speck, *Stability and strife: England, 1714-1760* (London, 1977); H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and property: political ideology in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1977).

¹⁰¹ J. H. Plumb, *England in the eighteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1950), pp. 43-4. For Hogarth, see Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth’s harlot: sacred parody in Enlightenment England* (Baltimore and London, 2003).

¹⁰² Roy Porter, *English society in the eighteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p. 191.

However, such conclusions also risk buying into the terms of nineteenth-century critics of the spiritual vigour and godliness of the Hanoverian Church. Tractarian revivalists, Victorian high-churchmen, and evangelicals each had their own motives for writing an eighteenth-century history of spiritual enervation, theological indifference, and clerical apathy.¹⁰³ The debate about the state of the eighteenth-century Church of England will continue among social and church historians. Issues like pluralism, building maintenance, and spirituality will be balanced against such new challenges as urbanisation, industrialisation, and the rise of Methodism.¹⁰⁴ To pursue theories of civil religion in eighteenth-century Britain is to encounter an idealised portrait of learned and pastoral Christian ministry. It was a portrait painted by laymen and clergymen concerned with the spiritual mission of the church and its relationship with the civil state.

Civil religion and the Enlightenment in England and Scotland

It is a basic contention of this study that ideas of civil religion formed an important but neglected theme of the Enlightenment in England and Scotland. Civil religionists believed priestly power had so disturbed the civil peace that it needed to be brought to heel. They also concerned themselves with reconciling religious pluralism and public religion.¹⁰⁵ As Dan Edelstein has shown, the seventeenth-century wars of religion provided the occasion for intellectuals to grapple with religion and political life, maintaining a civil order free from religious zeal and, increasingly, turned towards worldly improvement.¹⁰⁶ Enlightened thinkers were developing a riposte, traced in the French context by Carl Becker, to Augustine's ridicule of Cicero's immortal commonwealth and civil theology of worldly citizens in book 22 of the fifth-century *The city of God against the pagans*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ For Holmes, the eighteenth century was marked by 'spiritual inertia', 'religious tranquillity, within the framework of an Erastian polity', and witnessed little religious controversy following the conclusion of the Sacheverell trial. See *Trial of Doctor Sacheverell*, pp. 274-6.

¹⁰⁴ The apparent lack of receptiveness to the efforts of Norman Sykes to restore the reputation of the eighteenth-century Church has been a motivation for more recent research. See Sykes, *Church and state*; Peter Virgin, *The church in an age of negligence* (Cambridge, 1989); Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor (eds.), *Church of England*; W. M. Jacob, *The clerical profession in the long eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, religion, and the enigma of secularization: a review essay', *American historical review*, 108:4 (2003), 1061-80; *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture* (Princeton, 2005), especially pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: a genealogy* (Chicago, 2010), pp. 13, 125.

¹⁰⁷ Carl Becker, *The heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London, [1932] 2003).

The tendency of Enlightenment scholarship is to focus purely on the inward beliefs of thinkers.¹⁰⁸ When historians confront sceptics or atheists who upheld the established religion, it is easiest to explain the apparent tension by pragmatism. Elite irreligionists realised the need, runs the argument, to use religion to keep the vulgar governable. Machiavellian conceptions of the political utility of religion converge here with elite conservatism. But to subscribe to such a view is to miss much of the point. Undoubtedly, there existed a distinction between esoteric and exoteric philosophy. Some regions of the cultural world of the Enlightenment in England were imbued with elite exclusivism. This had Ciceronian dimensions. Just as Cicero had respected the superstitions of the commonality in Rome, so the Enlightened sceptic must observe the outward ritual of the established church.¹⁰⁹

However, this study will dwell remarkably little on questions of inward belief or unbelief. Whatever their inward thoughts, civil religionists held a principled commitment to the church-state relationship bequeathed by the Reformation. They believed the Reformation had afforded precisely the same liberty to the deist or sceptic as it had to the Dissenter or heterodox Anglican. Their world had been bequeathed by the struggles of Christian Reform. Their civil state was a legacy of the religious battles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their civil order had been threatened by the wars of religion. Their subjects and citizens, irrespective of denomination, needed parochial clergymen. Historians might be attracted by the idea of smug unbelievers sniggering from within the comfort of the cabinet and the secrecy of the lodge at the ridiculous superstitions of the commonality. Even if some did, they believed their liberty derived from precisely the same sources as the sincere Anglican or evangelising Dissenter. They also believed public religion, rightly construed, was a feature of civilised society. They expressed their belonging within the Christian commonwealth of eighteenth-century Britain by observing the externals of faith.

Such was the assessment of Alexis de Tocqueville in reflecting on the causes of the French Revolution. England, he judged, had had its fair share of irreligion. It was ‘Bolingbroke who taught Voltaire’. But irreligionists never took their philosophies to the

¹⁰⁸ A weaker example of this enterprise is David Berman’s *A history of atheism in Britain from Hobbes to Russell* (London, 1988). Stronger examples include Hunter and Wootton (eds.), *Atheism*; Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (eds.), *Atheism and deism revalued: heterodox religious identities in Britain, 1650-1800* (Farnham, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, Cicero, *De senectute, de amicitia, de divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (London, 1923), pp. 337-9. For the centrality of Ciceronian scepticism, see Tim Stuart-Buttle, ‘Classicism, Christianity, and Ciceronian Academic scepticism from Locke to Hume, c.1660-c.1760’, unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Oxford, 2013). Unfortunately, the present study was completed before the appearance of Stuart-Buttle’s monograph, *From moral theology to moral philosophy: Cicero, Christianity and human nature from Locke to Hume* (Oxford, forthcoming).

conclusions of French *libertinage érudit* because they ‘had something to fear from a revolution’. They ‘hastened to come to the aid of the established beliefs’. Political parties ‘found it in their interest to unite their cause with that of the Church’. Bolingbroke became ‘the ally of the bishops’. Whatever ‘the defects of its establishment and the abuses of all sorts which worked within it’, elites revered the Church of England. Hume, ‘like a politician’, shared such reverence. But this was more than mere pragmatism. Religion ‘is useful for the stability of the law and the good order of society’. Further, ‘a civilised society, but above all a free society, cannot subsist without religion’. Respect for religion was ‘the greatest guarantee of the stability of the state and the security of individuals’.¹¹⁰

Throughout the eighteenth century, there was a sincere reverence for public religion as a feature of civilised society. The concern with religion improperly construed expressed itself in opposition to over-weening priestly power and barbarous enthusiasm. It is wise to recall the instruction of J. C. D. Clark to study the ways in which, between the Restoration and Catholic emancipation, England retained features of the *ancien régime* and confessional society including tory and high-church ideologies of divine-right monarchy and episcopacy.¹¹¹ Clark’s arguments have not passed without controversy and have been overstated.¹¹² His portrayal of the Church of England as a monolithic institution of *jure divino* tory high-churchmanship belied the many currents of reform that thrived within it. Further, his insistence that reform and ‘radicalism’ emerged only from Protestant Dissent neglected those possibilities within the establishment.¹¹³ Still, Clark provided a useful corrective to liberal and *marxisant* obsessions with locating the origins of secular modernity.

The questions of the religious character of the state and the role of clergymen dominated the century.¹¹⁴ The cry of ‘church in danger’ lasted for decades throughout the occasional conformity controversy until the repeal of the high-church, tory Occasional

¹¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The old regime and the Revolution*, eds. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan, 2 vols. (Chicago and London, 1998), I, p. 206.

¹¹¹ J. C. D. Clark, *English society, 1660-1832*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2000); ‘On hitting the buffers: the historiography of England’s *ancien régime*: a response’, *Past & present*, 117 (1987), 195-207. See also *Revolution and rebellion: state and society in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1986); *The language of liberty: political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹¹² Joanna Innes, ‘Jonathan Clark, social history, and England’s “*ancien régime*”’, *Past & present*, 115:1 (1987), 165-200; Frank O’Gorman, ‘Eighteenth-century England as an *ancien régime*’, in *Hanoverian Britain and empire: essays in memory of Philip Lawson*, eds. Stephen Taylor, Richard Connors, and Clyve Jones (Woodbridge, 1998), 23-36.

¹¹³ Clark, *English society*, especially pp. 40, 334-48.

¹¹⁴ For a sympathetic recent analysis in the field of literary studies, see especially the fleeting but suggestive references to civil religion in Harrington, Shaftesbury, Gordon, and Middleton in Philip Connell, *Secular chains: poetry and the politics of religion from Milton to Pope* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 54, 136, 162, 240, 242.

Conformity Act (1711) in 1719 and the Bangorian controversy following the incendiary sermon by Hoadly to George I entitled *The nature of the kingdom of Christ* (1717). It carried into Robert Walpole's much-satirised relationship with Gibson and their support for the Quaker's Tithe Bill and the Mortmain Acts during the 1730s. In *The pillars of priestcraft and orthodoxy shaken* (1752), the Dissenter Richard Baron raised 'everlasting reasons for opposing all priests, and an unanswerable argument against all their claims of power and authority'. He aimed to emancipate 'the minds of men, and to free them from those chains in which they have been long held to the great disgrace of both reason and Christianity'.¹¹⁵ Gibbon argued that the 'public establishment of Christianity may be considered as one of those important and domestic revolutions which excite the most lively curiosity, and afford the most valuable instruction'. The 'ecclesiastical institutions' of Constantine's reign 'are still connected by an indissoluble chain, with the opinions, the passions, and the interests of the present generation'.¹¹⁶

The Enlightenment in England was not the same as its more militant counterpart in France.¹¹⁷ There was neither *un parti des philosophes* nor a civil religion of a deistical supreme being akin to that of Maximilien Robespierre. An ox can indeed sit upon the tongue when England is understood by Gallo-centric terms.¹¹⁸ But this should not be to occlude the nature of English anticlericalism and civil religion. As Roy Porter argued, the Enlightenment 'throve in England *within* piety'.¹¹⁹ Its exponents insisted that they were not simply defending right religion in general but Christianity above all. Pocock and B. W. Young have shown that the Enlightenment in England was 'conservative and in several ways clerical'.¹²⁰ This study

¹¹⁵ Richard Baron, *The pillars of priestcraft and orthodoxy shaken*, 4 vols. (London, 1752), I, pp. iii, vi.

¹¹⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire*, ed. David Womersley, 3 vols. (London, 1994), I, p. 725.

¹¹⁷ For a classic Gallo-centric account, see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation*, 2 vols. (London, 1966-9). Robert Darnton took the American and French Revolutions as emblematic of the Enlightenment. See 'In search of the Enlightenment: recent attempts to create a social history of ideas', *Journal of modern history*, 43:1 (1971), 113-32; 'The case for the Enlightenment: George Washington's false teeth', in *George Washington's false teeth: an unconventional guide to the eighteenth century* (New York and London, 2003), 3-24.

¹¹⁸ Pocock once wryly observed that 'to try and articulate the phrase "the English Enlightenment" is to encounter inhibition; an ox sits upon the tongue'. See 'Post-puritan England', p. 91.

¹¹⁹ Roy Porter, 'The Enlightenment in England', in *The Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 6-8; *Enlightenment: Britain and the creation of the modern world* (London, 2000), p. 99. See also James Bradley, 'The changing shape of religious ideas in Enlightened England', in *Seeing things their way: intellectual history and the return of religion*, eds. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (Notre Dame, 2009), 175-201. For the view that the English Enlightenment represented a rebellion against Christianity, see Leslie Stephen, *History of English thought in the eighteenth century*, 3rd edn, 2 vols. (London, 1902), I, pp. 76-7.

¹²⁰ Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce', p. 528; 'Post-Puritan England'; B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in eighteenth-century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), p. 1; 'Religious history and the eighteenth-century historian', *Historical journal*, 43:3 (2000), 849-68. For Young's later suggestion that

takes seriously the suggestion of Pocock that historians might understand ‘the process of enlightenment in England as the slow but steady transformation of Anglicanism into a civil religion, which presented the King as sacred figure only because he was the head of all civil society, and society as embodying the sacred so effectively that it needed no representative of God to head it’. In this process, Anglicans syncretised the holy spirit with the structures of society to undermine the enthusiastic claim that the holy spirit could infuse the godly few.¹²¹ This process also became a vanguard against the insensible excesses of freethinking.¹²²

The contributions of Pocock and Young sit alongside a larger movement in Enlightenment scholarship to show how the Enlightenment emerged within self-consciously rational, Socinian, and Protestant forms of Christianity.¹²³ Some have usefully questioned whether the Enlightenment was a movement for secularisation.¹²⁴ But the Enlightenment in England and Scotland also had roots in the Reformation. Slowly and gently, as S. J. Barnett has argued, the long Reformation gave way to the Enlightenment.¹²⁵ The anticlericalism of the Enlightenment emerged from the Reformed polemic against priests. Weapons like *imperium in imperio* and *praemunire* had been used against the papacy in the medieval church; against Roman Catholic bishops during the Henrician Reformation; against intolerant Anglicans by tolerationists during the late-seventeenth century; and against closed priesthoods in general during the Enlightenment.

The conservative and clerical Enlightenment in England did not, however, possess a monopoly on civil religion. It was also a feature of Enlightened Dissent. Pocock described an Enlightenment ‘of and by the increasingly rationalist sects, as well as an Enlightenment

the Enlightenment in England could also be ‘lay and liberal’, see B. W. Young, ‘John Jortin, ecclesiastical history, and the Christian republic of letters’, *Historical journal*, 55:4 (2012), p. 973.

¹²¹ Pocock, ‘Clergy and commerce’, p. 534.

¹²² John Redwood, *Reason, ridicule and religion: the Enlightenment in England, 1660-1750* (London, 1976); B. W. Young, ‘“The soul-sleeping system”: politics and heresy in eighteenth-century England’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 45:1 (1994), 64-81; P. C. Almond, *Heaven and hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge, 1994); Gregory, ‘The eighteenth-century Reformation’.

¹²³ The literature is huge. See, for example, Hugh Trevor-Roper, ‘The religious origins of the Enlightenment’, in *Religion, the Reformation and social change* (London, 1967), 193-236; *Catholics, Anglicans and puritans* (Chicago, 1988); Sheridan Gilley, ‘Christianity and Enlightenment’, *History of European ideas*, 1:2 (1981), 103-121; David Spadafora, *The idea of progress in eighteenth-century Britain* (New Haven, 1990); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1999-2015); Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2000); James Bradley and Dale van Kley (eds.), *Religion and politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, IN, 2001); S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and religion: the myths of modernity* (Manchester, 2003); Mark Curran, *Atheism, religion and Enlightenment in pre-revolutionary Europe* (Woodbridge, 2012).

¹²⁴ David Sorkin, ‘*A wise, enlightened and reliable piety*’: the religious Enlightenment in central and western Europe, 1689-1789 (Southampton, 2002); *The religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, 2008).

¹²⁵ S. J. Barnett, *Idol temples and crafty priests: the origins of Enlightenment anticlericalism* (Basingstoke, 1999).

directed against the enthusiasm of the sects'.¹²⁶ This strand of the Enlightenment claimed to apply the ideals of reason and civility to the theologies of Protestant Dissent. It took the language once used to justify the church-state relationship of whig England to its fullest conclusions and turned it against that very order. In its Socinian and Unitarian guises, its Christology denied the trinity and treated Christ merely as an exemplary mortal. It developed the Reformed assumption that the mission of the state was the overthrow of the popish Antichrist and attacked the remnants of popery in English Protestantism.¹²⁷ But eighteenth-century Dissent shed the tendency of its forebears to slip into a millennial intolerant rule of saints. Many Dissenters dropped the Calvinist insistence on grace. Dissenters believed humankind was neither theologically pure nor morally perfect but continually improving. Away from the radical fringes, Dissenters could concede the need for an established church and a regulated public religion if human religious knowledge remained imperfect. In Enlightened Dissent, among figures like Priestley and Price, lay a new version of civil religion. It seized the language of civility and politeness and handed it to the congregations of Dissenters, who elected their learned and pastoral ministers while coexisting with the Church of England.

'In England', Franco Venturi famously claimed, 'the rhythm was different.' There 'the organisation of the Enlightenment did not exist' and 'there was no "parti des philosophes"' in London. It was only during the 1780s that a 'nascent intelligentsia' emerged among such men as Price, Jeremy Bentham, Tom Paine, and William Godwin.¹²⁸ These men were various products of Enlightened Dissent. Yet, in developing theories of civil religion, thinkers like Price claimed to be carrying the banner of the Enlightenment away from the Church of England. Price once remarked that at the time of the establishment of the Church of England, 'the nation was but emerging from Popery'. Was it possible, he asked, that the establishment 'should be entirely agreeable to the purity of the Christian doctrine' and that 'it should want no review in order to secure its safety, and adapt it to a more improved and enlightened age'?¹²⁹

So far in this discussion, Scotland has been conspicuous by her absence. The title of this study refers to civil religion in Britain. The justification is the presence of Hume, whose

¹²⁶ Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce', pp. 97-8. See also Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and religion in eighteenth-century Britain: rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996).

¹²⁷ Lamont, *Godly rule*; Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the millennium and the future of Israel: puritan eschatology, 1600-1660* (Cambridge and London, 1970); E. L. Tuveson, *Millennium and utopia* (Gloucester, MA, 1972); Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon*; Firth, *Apocalyptic tradition*.

¹²⁸ Franco Venturi, *Utopia and reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 132.

¹²⁹ Richard Price, *Political writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge, 1991), p. 10.

writings shared English and Scottish contexts. Pocock has discussed Hume's self-perception as 'North Briton' and Colin Kidd has reminded historians of the value of studying Scotland within an 'Anglo-British' framework.¹³⁰ This is not the occasion for a full-scale exploration of theories of civil religion in the Scottish Enlightenment.¹³¹ Nevertheless, analysis of Hume not only throws relief onto the English dimension but also suggests possible points of departure in Scotland. Hume, the renowned sceptic, represents a vital case study in both the English and Scottish contexts of a thinker who upheld the magisterial Anglican and elder-elective Presbyterian Reformations for principled reasons beyond a merely tactical desire to keep the poor governable.

The Presbyterian Reformation produced the Scottish Kirk, which, as a national church devoid of episcopacy, attained a fundamentally different character from the established and episcopal Church of England.¹³² Scottish civil religion would lack the language of godly kingship. Its ecclesiology would be less magisterial than elective. It would focus more intensely on the universities and the organisation of groups of *literati*.¹³³ It would be more scientific by its focus on the science of man and manners. Enlightened Scottish histories of religion sat within stadial histories of progress. The history of moving beyond the pastoral stage, for instance, was simultaneously the history of the progress from polytheism to monotheism. Scottish civil religion would, therefore, concern itself more systematically with political economy.¹³⁴ Opponents of Scottish civil religion were not Anglican high-churchmen with their falsified apostolic inheritance but superstitious *jure divino* Presbyterians relying on

¹³⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Hume and the American Revolution: the dying thoughts of a North Briton', in *Virtue, commerce, and history: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985), 125-41; Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993).

¹³¹ Mark Goldie presented a paper, which he never published, on this theme at a seminar in Edinburgh in 1986. I am grateful that he gave me access to his notes. Kidd also suggested possible points of departure in 'Constructing a civil religion: Scots Presbyterians and the eighteenth-century British state' in *The Scottish churches and the Union parliament, 1707-1999*, ed. J. Kirk (Edinburgh, 2001), 1-21.

¹³² Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: the age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh, 1973).

¹³³ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Culture and society in the eighteenth-century province: the case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The university in society*, ed. Lawrence Stone, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1974), II, 407-47; 'The Scottish Enlightenment' in *Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Porter and Teich, 19-40; Porter, *Enlightenment*, 19-40; Richard Sher, *Church and university in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton, 1985).

¹³⁴ For Scotland, see John Robertson, *The case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005). See, more generally, Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1988); A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, economics and religion: Christian political economy, 1793-1833* (Cambridge, 1991); Donald Winch, *Riches and poverty: an intellectual history of political economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge, 1996). For England, see George Shelton, *Dean Tucker and eighteenth-century economic and political thought* (New York, 1981); J. G. A. Pocock, 'Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: a study in the varieties of eighteenth-century conservatism', in *Virtue, commerce, and history*, 157-91.

predestination. Scottish civil religion was a product of the Enlightenment of the Scottish Moderates in the face of the enthusiastic Covenanting spirit of the Popular party. Its clerical exponents included William Robertson, William Wishart, and the erstwhile clergyman Adam Ferguson. Its lay representatives included Hume, Francis Hutcheson, John Millar, William Guthrie, Adam Smith, and Henry Home, Lord Kames. They synthesised classical politics, especially Cicero and Seneca, with Christian primitivism.¹³⁵ The Presbyterianism of Scottish civil religion was generally a natural religion of virtue. It was a religion of sociability and civil concord rather than external formalism. Its religious temper would lead its proponents to engage in cosmopolitan fashion with movements of Christian Reform on the continent.¹³⁶ True religion, refined of the popery that incorporated the superstitious practices of primitive pagans, was the goal.

The scholarship of civil religion

Having related civil religion to the Enlightenment in England and Scotland, it is now possible fully to appreciate the problem of Rousseau. The Genevan has provided the standard by which historians and political theorists generally define civil religion. They flatter Rousseau by arguing that he formulated the idea of civil religion, prompted by incomplete interventions from Machiavelli and Hobbes. Civil religion, in this guise, becomes the tool of the politician seeking to keep a populace governable by confected theological inducements. Following the Second World War, this definition resulted in the association of civil religion with modern totalitarianism. Scholars looked back to the influence of Rousseau on Robespierre and the Terror. They often added G. W. F. Hegel to the canon of theorists of civil religion by his sanctification of the Prussian state and providential understanding of the development of national history. Civil religion was blind submission to the state. It represented either the reversal of the modern insight of the separation of church and state or it ignored the Augustinian claim that humans in the earthly city were not perfectible.¹³⁷

The most recent statement of the standard interpretation of civil religion has been provided by Ronald Beiner who argued that there is a tradition of civil religion, principally

¹³⁵ I. D. L. Clark, 'From protest to reaction: the Moderate regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805', in *Scotland in the age of improvement: essays in Scottish history in the eighteenth century*, eds. N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh, 1970), 200-24.

¹³⁶ For Scottish cosmopolitanism, see Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 58 (1967), 1635-58; Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics*.

¹³⁷ Karl Popper, *The open society and its enemies*, 2 vols. (London, 1945); J. L. Talmon, *The origins of totalitarian democracy* (London, 1952); Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 31.

defined by Rousseau, involving ‘the appropriation of religion by politics for its own purposes’. Those purposes were to make the religious loyal to political authority and empowering religion in forming good citizens.¹³⁸ Beiner’s methodology was fundamentally different from that of this study. He rejected that which he called the ‘historicist-contextualist’ method and treated his subjects as being engaged perennially in dialogues about universal principles across time.¹³⁹ The result, for Beiner, was that all possible discussants of civil religion were engaged in the same pursuit and were either anticipating or responding to Rousseau. Their unity is Beiner’s creation.

In social and political theory, the secularisation thesis has lent weight to the standard definition of civil religion. The development of the social science of religion itself had roots in atheism.¹⁴⁰ But secularisation theory, built especially around the arguments of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, has been most influential.¹⁴¹ The *Durkheimien* and Weberian traditions in sociology drew sharp distinctions between traditional and modern societies, identifying the decline of religion as emblematic of the transition from one to another. The disenchantment of the world replaced magic and superstition with science, reason, and scepticism. Durkheim, having consulted Rousseau, left open the possibility of a secular civil religion built around patriotism and based on sociology conceived as the science of morality.¹⁴² Under the guise of Marxism, secularisation theory reduced the status of religion to an element in the category of ‘ideology’, irrelevant to the material conditions of life.¹⁴³ Otherwise, social and political theorists have drawn liberal conclusions that religion would inevitably decline, become separated from secular political authority, and ‘privatise’ to inward belief.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Ronald Beiner, *Civil religion: a dialogue in the history of political philosophy* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 1-3. See also Ronald Beiner, ‘Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau on civil religion’, *Review of politics*, 55:4 (1993), 617-38; ‘Civil religion and anticlericalism in James Harrington’, *European journal of political theory*, 13:4 (2014), 388-407.

¹³⁹ Beiner, *Civil religion*, p. x.

¹⁴⁰ Rodney Stark, ‘Atheism, faith, and the social scientific study of religion’, *Journal of contemporary religion*, 14:1 (1999), 41-62.

¹⁴¹ Talcott Parsons, ‘The theoretical development of the sociology of religion’, in *Journal of the history of ideas*, 5:2 (1944), 176-90. On Weber, see Wolfgang Schluchter, *Rationalism, religion and domination: a Weberian perspective* (Berkeley, 1989). For a classic Weberian account of secularisation, see Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris, 1985).

¹⁴² Ruth A. Wallace, ‘Emile Durkheim and the civil religion concept’, *Review of religious research*, 18:3 (1977), 287-90; Marcela Christi, ‘Durkheim’s political sociology: civil religion, nationalism and globalisation’, in *Holy nations and global identities: civil religion, nationalism and globalisation*, eds. Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg, and Brian Jacobsen (Leiden, 2009), 47-78.

¹⁴³ Goldie, ‘Ideology’.

¹⁴⁴ Early defences include Bryan Wilson, *Religion in secular society* (London, 1966); Peter Berger, *The sacred canopy* (Garden City, NJ, 1967); Thomas Luckmann, *The invisible religion: the problem of religion in modern society* (New York, 1967).

However, encouraged by Jürgen Habermas, the growth of the idea of the ‘post-secular’ has generated new avenues of research into the history of civil religion.¹⁴⁵ The post-secular turn has also begun to alert intellectual historians to the secular assumptions of the discipline.¹⁴⁶ The prominence of public religion whether in the guise of evangelical Protestantism or fundamentalist Islam as well as debates caused by integration and pluralism in multicultural society have made scholars wary of suggestions that religion could be ‘privatised’ or that it was bound to decline irretrievably, however much differentiation has occurred between secular and religious spheres.¹⁴⁷ This research matters because it shows the importance of understanding the Enlightenment properly. Since the secularisation thesis has relied on an impression of the Enlightenment in its most irreligious and secularising moods, it is necessary to study how Enlightened thinkers sought to reconcile rational and civilised religion with the state and civil society.¹⁴⁸ Even the most inwardly sceptical Hanoverian civil religionist argued that religion was a natural and inevitable feature of humanity. It was not simply that public arrangements needed to cope with religious belief. It was also that private belief and public worship were intrinsic aspects of political society.

Perhaps because it so poorly fits the standard secularisation thesis, it is in America that the same sociologists, especially Robert Bellah and Philip Gorski, who have advanced the idea of the post-secular, have also researched civil religion.¹⁴⁹ By their reading, the political language of American republicanism emerged partly from the Calvinist idea of a covenanted community.¹⁵⁰ To consult this literature from the perspective of British historical

¹⁴⁵ Jürgen Habermas and Eduardo Hendieta, *Religion and rationality: essays on reason, God and modernity* (Cambridge, 2002); Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialectics of secularization: on reason and religion* (San Francisco, 2006); Jürgen Habermas, ‘Religion in the public sphere’, *European journal of philosophy*, 14:1 (2006), 1-25; ‘Notes on post-secular society’, *New perspectives quarterly*, 25:4 (2008), 17-29. For a recent survey of the ‘post-secular’, see Philip S. Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *The post-secular in question: religion in contemporary society* (New York and London, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ Chapman, Coffey, and Gregory (eds.), *Seeing things their way*.

¹⁴⁷ David Martin, *The religious and the secular: studies in secularization* (London, 1969); Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular man: the persistence of religion* (New York, 1972); Jeffrey K. Haddon and Anson Shupe (eds.), *Prophetic religions and politics* (New York, 1986); Emile F. Sahliye, *Religious resurgence and politics in the modern world* (Albany, 1990); Thomas Robbins and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Church-state relations: tensions and transitions* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987); José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago and London, 1994). Peter Berger repudiated his earlier attachment to the secularisation thesis in *The desecularization of the world: resurgent religion and world politics* (Washington, DC, 1999).

¹⁴⁸ For that which Casanova has called ‘the Enlightenment critique of religion’, see *Public religions*, pp. 30-2.

¹⁴⁹ For a comparison of America and Europe, see Grace Davie, *Europe, the exceptional case: parameters of faith in the modern world* (London, 2002); Peter L. Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, secular Europe? A theme and variation* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond belief: essays on religion in a post-traditional world* (New York, 1970); *The broken covenant: American civil religion in time of trial*, 2nd edn (Chicago and London, 1975); John A. Coleman, ‘Civil religion’, *Sociology analysis* 31 (1970), 67-77; R. E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (eds.), *American civil religion* (New York, 1974); Sidney E. Mead, *The nation with the soul of a church* (New York,

research is to blench at intruding into private grief and to risk inadvertently siding with liberals seeking to ‘civilise’ evangelical Protestantism.¹⁵¹ Further, the absence of a formal church establishment under the state separates American civil religion from the eighteenth-century British experience. Nevertheless, American sociologists have kept alive the study of the relationship between the state and organised religion at the same time as the triumph of the secularisation thesis left it languishing near the bottom of the agenda among British and European historians.

In the context of British historical scholarship, Goldie has outlined the most fruitful approach for understanding concepts of civil religion in eighteenth-century Britain.¹⁵² Goldie’s main interest was James Harrington, especially in *The commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). Harrington’s civil religion was in the time of the Interregnum.¹⁵³ It was the synthesis of classical republicanism with the religious themes of Erastianism and Independency.¹⁵⁴ Its mood was puritan and millennial. Its theology was Platonist. Its ecclesiology was congregational rather than magisterial. Harrington’s priesthood of all believers allowed him to adapt the ancient civil religions into the seventeenth-century Christian republic. Athens and Rome had been transmuted into the Promised Land.¹⁵⁵ Henry Neville reformulated Harrington’s civil religion for the temper of the Restoration through his publication, in 1675, of the works of Machiavelli. In *Plato redivivus* (1681), Neville developed a neo-Harringtonian civil religion by transforming Harrington’s republican congregationalism into

1975); John F. Wilson, *Public religion in American culture* (Philadelphia, 1979); Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of civil religion* (San Francisco, 1980); Michael W. Hughey, *Civil religion and moral order* (Westport, CT, 1983); James A. Mathison, ‘Whatever happened to American civil religion?’ *Sociological analysis*, 50:2 (1989), 129-46; Ronald Weed and John von Keyking (eds.), *Civil religion in political thought: its perennial questions and enduring relevance in North America* (Washington, DC, 2010); Philip Gorski, ‘Historicizing the secularization debate: church, state, and society in late medieval and early modern Europe, ca. 1300-1700’, *American sociological review*, 65:1 (2000), 138-67; ‘The return of the repressed: religion and the political unconscious of historical sociology’, in *Remaking modernity: politics, history, and sociology*, eds. Julie Adams et al. (Durham, NC, and London, 2005), 161-89; *American covenant: a history of civil religion from the puritans to the present* (Princeton, 2017).

¹⁵¹ Beiner, a Canadian, also defined himself as a liberal who was sceptical of the viability of a project of civil religion in contemporary politics and who challenged that which he took to be the supposed innocence of religion. See *Civil religion*, pp. xiv, 411-19.

¹⁵² See Goldie’s seminar paper, which outlined many of the themes pursued in this study, presented at the Folger Institute Center for the History of Political Thought. Mark Goldie, ‘Civil religion and the English Enlightenment’, in *Politics, politeness, and patriotism*, ed. Gordon Schochet (Washington, DC, 1993), 31-46. See also John Marshall, ‘Some intellectual consequences of the English revolution’, *European legacy*, 5:4 (2000), p. 519.

¹⁵³ Goldie, ‘Civil religion and the English Enlightenment’, p. 35.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth principles: republic writing of the English revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 52-4.

¹⁵⁵ Goldie, ‘Civil religion of James Harrington.

the magisterial doctrine of the crown-in-parliament.¹⁵⁶ The Shaftesburean *Letter from a person of quality* reveals a similar neo-Harringtonian move.¹⁵⁷

Therefore, for Goldie, opponents of priestcraft were whigs. Goldie was struck by how use of the term ‘priestcraft’, which, he claimed, Harrington had first used in *Pian piano* (1657), exploded during the 1690s among fashionable whig anticlericals like Sir Robert Howard and William Stephens following the ending of censorship of the press and the arrival of the Toleration Act.¹⁵⁸ Priestcraft also became a target of Marvell, Thomas Papillon, Edmund Hickerlingill, Henry Care, Reverend Samuel Johnson, John Dennis, Anthony Ashley Cooper, first earl of Shaftesbury, William Popple, Henry Hill, Toland, and Molesworth.¹⁵⁹ Locke remains a striking candidate for a civil religion in arguing for a tolerant public religion based on Christian primitivism but criticising the superstitious priestcraft of a hierocratic episcopate and the Filmerian compact between *jure divino* priesthood and monarchy.¹⁶⁰ In calling for an investigation of ‘the possibility of an English Enlightenment’, Goldie asked ‘how much of English party politics in the whig era was concerned with the construction of a civil religion’.¹⁶¹ But to pursue civil religion into the eighteenth century is to encounter a different temper than those of the Interregnum and Restoration. Civil religion was a central plank of the ecclesiological agenda of eighteenth-century whigs and low-church ecclesiastics. But, just as the English Enlightenment could have tory moods, felt, not least, by Bolingbroke and the young Gibbon, English civil religionists could have tory and sacerdotal inclinations.

That the roots of civil religion lay not simply among whigs and low-churchmen has been demonstrated recently by Bulman. He has shown that theories of civil religion were developed during the Restoration by sacerdotal Anglican divines as well as whigs and low-churchmen as all modes of Anglican politics attempted to generate civil peace following the Interregnum. The aim of each was a variety of Christianity that promoted civilisation, morality, worldly improvement, political stability, and virtuous subjecthood. It was pastoral in focus and averred disputatious conflict for primitive moral virtue. It was a concept

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 221-2.

¹⁵⁷ Goldie, ‘Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism’, pp. 226-7.

¹⁵⁸ Goldie, ‘Civil religion of James Harrington’, p. 212; ‘Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism’, 209-31; ‘Civil religion and the English Enlightenment’, pp. 38-9, 41-2. The term ‘Priestis craft’ appeared in Thomas Nash’s *Mar martine* (1589), sig. A3v. I am grateful to Justin Champion for this reference.

¹⁵⁹ Goldie, ‘Priestcraft and the birth of whiggism’; ‘Civil religion and the English Enlightenment’, p. 34.

¹⁶⁰ Mark Goldie ‘John Locke and Anglican royalism’, *Political studies*, 31:1 (1983), 61-85; Theodore J. Koontz, ‘Religion and political cohesion: John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau’, *Journal of church and state*, 23:1 (1981), 950-115; A. L. Herold, “‘The chief characteristical mark of the true church’: John Locke’s theology of toleration and his case for civil religion”, *Review of politics*, 76:2 (2014), 195-221. See also John Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 517.

¹⁶¹ Mark Goldie, ‘Civil religion and the English Enlightenment’, p. 45.

contested by the whig doyen Addison through his vision of the church as an earthly society created and dominated by the secular civil magistrate. Conversely, Addison's sacerdotal Anglican father, Lancelot, conceived of the church as a distinct society blessed with *jure divino* priesthood, and of an alliance between princes and priests to form the state and defend civil society. Other candidates for such a vision of civil religion included Adam Littleton, William Gould, Stillingfleet, and Parker.¹⁶² Bulman has provided a valuable check to the tendency to suppose that civil religion and whiggism were coterminous. Sacerdotal justifications of clerical authority, usually strongly associated with partisan high-church toryism, underpinned the idea, propounded by Warburton and Gibson, of the church as a distinct society that had entered an alliance with the state.

Some historians have also argued that there might have been a more 'radical' version of civil religion in early Hanoverian England.¹⁶³ But a great deal of care is advisable. A motivation for this research is to locate a revolt against Christianity that anticipated the Enlightenment in France, casting English intellectual history at the turn of the eighteenth century as a battle between priests and freethinkers centred around the deist controversy.¹⁶⁴ Such historians have taken their cue from the 'radical Enlightenment' of Margaret Jacob in which illuminist freemasons developed pantheist philosophies and were ranged against the forces of the magisterial Enlightenment.¹⁶⁵ A popular candidate for such a 'radical' civil religion is Toland. For Jonathan Israel, one of Toland's contributions to the 'radical Enlightenment', a Spinozist construct, was in *Nazarenus* (1718) when he attempted to 'dechristianize Christianity and remodel it as a republican civil religion'.¹⁶⁶

In his own formulation of the 'radical Enlightenment', built from secular materialism, Spinozism, and esoteric pantheism, Justin Champion has similarly described Toland's civil religion. Toland launched his pantheist, materialist, and 'radical republican' critique of Christian revelation by studying a supposed *respublica mosaica*. Moses had merely been a

¹⁶² Bulman, *Anglican Enlightenment*, pp. 8, 141-5, 285-90.

¹⁶³ On the dangers of using the term 'radical' uncritically in early modern intellectual history, see Conal Condren, 'Radicals, conservatives and moderates in early modern political thought: a case of Sandwich Islands syndrome?', *History of political thought*, 10:3 (1989), 525-42.

¹⁶⁴ Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*, pp. 22, 186-91, 192-222; "'Religion's safe, with priestcraft is the war": Augustan anticlericalism and the legacy of the English revolution, 1660-1720', *European legacy*, 5:4 (2000), 547-61. See also Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The meaning and end of religion* (Minneapolis, 1962), pp. 48-50; Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment*, (Cambridge, 2002); E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's fable: Bernard Mandeville and the discovery of society* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁶⁵ Margaret C. Jacob, *The radical Enlightenment: pantheists, freemasons, and republicans* (London, 1981); *Living the Enlightenment: freemasonry and politics in eighteenth-century Europe* (New York, 1991).

¹⁶⁶ Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650-1750*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 613. For Israel's 'moderate Enlightenment', see *Enlightenment contested: philosophy, modernity, and the emancipation of man, 1670-1752* (Oxford, 2006).

prudent politic legislator and not a divinely inspired Hebrew patriarch akin to Lycurgus, Solon or Numa. Religion was simply an instrument of state power to generate duty among citizens of the commonwealth. Moses had studied the priestcraft of the Egyptians and, purging their errors, established a simple religion of nature. The later superstitions of the ancient Jews were post-mosaic inspirations that resulted in Jewish and Christian priestcraft.¹⁶⁷ By this formulation, Toland was also providing a ‘radical’ reading of Cicero’s *De republica*.¹⁶⁸ However, even though Hanoverian theorists of civil religion like Bolingbroke denied the claim that Moses had been divinely inspired, they still argued that gospel Christianity could be the basis for a civil religion.

Another popular candidate for the ‘radical’ reading is Henry Stubbe. In James R. Jacob’s analysis, Stubbe belonged to the ‘radical Enlightenment’ opposed to the union between Anglican ‘latitudinarianism’ and the Royal Society. Stubbe’s was a ‘radical civil religion’, built from vitalism and materialism, that reduced Christianity to a deistical minimum. It involved ‘a commitment to a secularizing society in which men would pursue national unity, peace and prosperity for all and turn their backs on conservative and clerical Protestantism’. After the Restoration, this civil religion mutated into a natural religion replete with a hankering for paganism, pantheism, secular historicism, intense anticlericalism, neo-Harringtonianism, Hobbism, Erastian ecclesiology, and Christian primitivism. Stubbe’s civil religion looked forward, concluded Jacob, to the ‘radical freethinking’ of the ‘early Enlightenment’ embodied by the likes of Charles Blount and Toland.¹⁶⁹

However, such ‘radical’ theories of civil religion were almost certainly marginal. Mainstream accounts congenial to the Church of England will be the focus of this study. Themes here presented accord with the civil religion of a less ‘radical’ Toland presented by Robert Sullivan.¹⁷⁰ In Sullivan’s interpretation, Toland emerged as a defender of the magisterial Reformation, who supported a national church that allowed for occasional conformity and theological latitude.¹⁷¹ Here was an ally of Hoadlyite Erastianism against tory

¹⁶⁷ Justin Champion, *Republican learning: John Toland and the crisis of Christian culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester and New York, 2003), pp. 9, 167-89.

¹⁶⁸ K. A. East, ‘*Superstitionis malleus*: John Toland, Cicero, and the war on priestcraft in early Enlightenment England’, *History of European ideas*, 40:7 (2014), 965-983; ‘Apocryphal Cicero: John Toland’s *Cicero illustratus* and notions of authority in the early Enlightenment’, *International journal of the classical tradition*, 23: 2 (2016), 108-126; ‘Cicero the pantheist: a radical reading of Ciceronian scepticism in John Toland’s *Pantheisticon* (1720)’, *Intellectual history review*, 26:2 (2016), 245-261.

¹⁶⁹ See James R. Jacob’s marxisant study, *Henry Stubbe, radical Protestantism and the early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 2-4, 6-7.

¹⁷⁰ Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the deist controversy: a study in adaptations* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-6, 142.

high-churchmanship. Toland's Socinianism forced him to distinguish in his civil theology between esoteric and exoteric philosophy but his account of 'state religion' was built from the convergence between natural religion and Erasmian primitivism.¹⁷² Still, Sullivan showed how Toland's position evolved, in public, towards Spinozism and pantheism.¹⁷³ Despite, or, perhaps, due to, his idiosyncrasies, Toland has been the focus of a great deal of scholarship. Since there was a large cast of other theorists of civil religion, Toland need not feature here.

Pursuing civil religion

The hypothesis of this study is that eighteenth-century English intellectuals believed the Church of England could be transformed into a civil religion. They attempted to render the Church as a public institution of the state, placing its priests under the *jure humano* authority of the civil sovereign. The articles of faith of the Church of England thus became a purely civil profession of faith. The ministers of the Church of England, at once claiming catholic apostolicity and the sole power to interpret revealed truth while recognising the imperfection of their articles of faith, were to preach the gospel message of Jesus Christ and prioritise pious living in this world over theological wrangling about the nature of the world to come. The civil religion of eighteenth-century England was one of shared rituals of public worship because its ministers were fallible humans who interpreted imperfectly the nature of the divine being. By observing the external worship of the Church of England, Hanoverian intellectuals hoped to fashion a modern Christian civil religion. This study presents a series of case studies to test this hypothesis, developing the findings of Tuck on Hobbes and Goldie on Harrington and his followers. The case studies include Shaftesbury, Trenchard, Gordon, Bolingbroke, Hume, and Gibbon. The studies also involve Anglican churchmen, encompassing Gibson, Warburton, and Middleton, as well as several Enlightened Dissenters such as Priestley and Price. Taken together, the studies reveal the varieties of civil religion in Hanoverian Britain.

The case studies are neither exhaustive of the thinkers concerned, nor, taken together, equivalent to a full excavation of civil religion in Hanoverian England. Aside from the scholarly preoccupation with 'radical republicanism', there remain many candidates for a civil religion congenial to Christianity and especially the Church of England in late-Stuart and Hanoverian Britain. Goldie has intimated that Locke might be one, suggesting a powerful

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 173-4, 184.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 185, 226.

revision of Locke understood as the father of the liberal separation between church and state. During the early years of the Hanoverian age, themes of civil religion might be pursued in Addison, Steele, and Bernard Mandeville. Further clerical candidates include Hoadly himself, the Hoadlyite controversialist Arthur Ashley Sykes, and the Cantabrigian ecclesiastical historian John Jortin. Among Dissenters, Baron provides an obvious point of departure. The limits of a study of this nature necessitate selectivity. A series of figures associated variously with scepticism, deism, low- and high-church Anglicanism, and Protestant Dissent have been chosen to reveal the breadth of theories of civil religion. They illustrate the central and uniting themes.

They also provide various test cases for the central contention of this study: that the generation of a Christian civil religion was more concerned with the regulation of the public role of religion than with inward belief. For the religious sceptic or deist, issues such as the trinity could be accepted as matters of faith for so long as they did not endanger civil peace or the state. For the Protestant Dissenter, the imperfect doctrines of the church establishment with its articles of faith need not imply its abolition since they merely reflected the imperfect state of religious knowledge among Christians. For low-church Anglicans, the church establishment rightly prioritised latitude to include as many sincere Christians within its fold as possible. For other low-church Anglicans, especially during the subscription controversy, the issue of sincerity led to opposition to the requirement for some professions to subscribe to the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England. Rather than imply abolition of the church establishment, opposition to subscription reinforced the need for the Church of England to comprehend all sincere Protestants within the Christian commonwealth.

Since a repeated insistence of this study will be the importance of prioritising ecclesiology over theology and, in turn, the public role of religion over inward belief, the method will involve different approaches towards published writings and private manuscripts or correspondence. In public, theorists of civil religion, especially when harbouring sceptical or deistical moods, concerned themselves with the church establishment. Their private writings often contain more heterodox or controversial opinions. Elite respect for popular belief in the Ciceronian mould or the distinction between esoteric and exoteric philosophy help to account for the difference between public and private writings. Sometimes, as in Bolingbroke's decision to publish his philosophical writings posthumously, caution about the public's reception influenced a thinker's attitude. As in the case of Gibbon's *Decline and fall* or Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (1779), public discussion of Christian history occasioned major controversy and secured a reputation for irreligion. Yet

Bolingbroke, Hume, and Gibbon each claimed that their arguments need not shake the fundamentals of Christian belief. To appreciate their claims, it is necessary first to construct their conception of the public role of religion.

The case studies that follow subdivide into analyses of individual thinkers and thematic chapters in which thinkers who were linked either contextually or conceptually will be gathered together. Chapter 2 will focus on the third earl of Shaftesbury. Trenchard and Gordon will be the subjects of chapter 3. Chapter 4 will study Bolingbroke, focusing particularly on his engagement with Warburton. Chapter 5 will turn to Hume. Chapter 6 will study Gibbon, exploring his response to Middleton. Chapter 7 will provide the final case study comprising Anglican clergymen who were variously political and religious reformers during the late-eighteenth century, especially Law and Blackburne, and developed civil religion using Anglican comprehension. It will also consider Protestant Dissenters, above all Priestley and Price, who conceived of a civil religion along Unitarian and congregational lines. Chapter 8 will discuss the response of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to eighteenth-century theories of civil religion in his attempt to prepare the national church for an age of Roman Catholic emancipation. It will then rehearse the central themes of Hanoverian civil religion before discussing the implications of these case studies for historians of the eighteenth century in Scotland, continental Europe, and America.

Chapter 2

Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury

Religious neo-Harringtonianism in the long Reformation

Shaftesbury tends to be understood as a deist and protagonist of Enlightenment proto-secularism. The inclination of modern scholarship is to fit Shaftesbury into a history of the origins of liberalism and to count him among the forebears of the separation between religion and politics.¹ Israel, for instance, associated Shaftesbury with the ‘radical Enlightenment’ alongside Blount, Collins, Toland, Tindal, and Bernard Mandeville.² Shaftesbury’s support for a national church has usually been exculpated as the tactic of a prudent elite who buttressed social order with theological sanction irrespective of his view of its truth.³ Such histories privilege Shaftesbury’s hostility towards sacerdotal priesthoods over the positive role that he imagined for Christian clergymen in civilised society. They foreground the extensive history of priestcraft developed in the ‘Miscellaneous reflections’ that appended Shaftesbury’s major work *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times* (1711).⁴ They downplay his inward professions of Protestant allegiance and dutiful attendance at his parish church.⁵ Where Shaftesbury has been associated with civil religion, it has been in its most deistical and secularising forms. Beiner equated civil religion with thoroughgoing hostility to priests, suggesting that ‘Shaftesbury offers another important example of the same theme’.⁶ Champion described Shaftesbury as a republican theorist of civil theology built from deism in a moment of developing unbelief on the margins of Anglicanism.⁷

Similarly, Shaftesbury has been classified as a ‘radical’ whig.⁸ He has been associated with such thinkers as Toland, Walter Moyle, Molesworth, Andrew Fletcher, Trenchard, and

¹ Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury’s philosophy of religion and ethics: a study in enthusiasm* (Athens, OH, 1967), p. 119.

² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 68, 116, 625-6, 709; *Enlightenment contested*, pp. 346, 348.

³ Alfred Owen Aldridge, ‘Shaftesbury and the deist manifesto’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series, 41 (1951), II, pp. 297-8; Grean, *Shaftesbury’s philosophy*, p. 105.

⁴ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 357-65, 371-3, 377-9.

⁵ See ‘A sketch of the life of the third earl of Shaftesbury by his son, the fourth earl’, in Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *The life, unpublished letters, and philosophical regimen of Anthony, earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London, 1900), p. xvii; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 471.

⁶ Beiner, *Civil religion*, p. 2n.

⁷ Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*, pp. 23, 229, 233.

⁸ Caroline Robbins, *The eighteenth-century commonwealthman* (Harvard, 1959), pp. 56, 88-95, 128-33; Robert Voitle, *The third earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Baton Rouge and London, 1984), p. 109; Blair Worden, ‘Introduction’, in Edmund Ludlow, *A voyce from the watch tower, part V: 1660-1662*, ed. Blair Worden (London, 1978), pp. 39-46; David Hayton, ‘The “country” interest and the party system’, in *Party and management in parliament, 1660-1784*, ed. Clyve Jones (New York, 1984), pp. 44, 52; Israel, *Enlightenment contested*, p. 348.

Gordon. In politics, these men were suspicious of the fiscal-military state because of their opposition to the court's wish during the late 1690s to maintain a standing army in peacetime. In Pocock's formulation, they were 'civic humanists' defending the autonomous freeholder-citizen in the country against the forces of junto whiggism of the court, the latter forces championed above all by John, Lord Somers.⁹ Although republican politics need not have implied irreligion, there is a tendency to suppose that these themes coexisted in Shaftesbury's circle. Linked with Anglo-Dutch intellectual circles in a 'republic of letters' and 'radical' Enlightenment, this mode of whiggism is considered fully anticlerical and deistical.¹⁰

The result of each of these associations has been the neglect of the primary context in which Shaftesbury produced *Characteristics*. He must be situated within the contemporary debate about the church-state relationship in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1688-9. He was interjecting in the political rivalries and paper wars raging between the developing 'high- and low-church' parties. He was defending a unique settlement in which the established church acquiesced to a degree of statutory toleration. Many of his arguments in private correspondence and published writings were aimed at the rulers of post-Revolutionary England. He was close to such men as Somers, with whom he corresponded regularly and exchanged manuscript editions of his work.¹¹ Somers was the anonymous addressee of Shaftesbury's *A Letter concerning enthusiasm to my lord ****** (1707). In 1698 Shaftesbury wrote a preface for his own edition of the sermons of the Restoration Cambridge divine Benjamin Whichcote.¹² There is also a relationship between Shaftesbury's religious writing and the complex plates published with the first edition of *Characteristics*.¹³ To understand Shaftesbury's civil religion fully, therefore, it is necessary to prioritise his ecclesiology over the intractable question of his inward belief. It will be argued that Shaftesbury aimed to transform the Church of England into a civil religion by defending the church-state relationship established by the Revolution of 1688-9 in the face of its tory and high-church detractors. He conformed outwardly with the catholic and apostolic claims of the Church of England and argued that its clergymen should preach gospel Christianity only. The heterodox sentiments that he expressed in private correspondence and personal manuscript works

⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 15.

¹⁰ Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 149.

¹¹ See, for example, the letter accompanying a copy of Shaftesbury's *Soliloquy* (1710): Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, to John, Lord Somers, 26 May 1710, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, pp. 420-1.

¹² Benjamin Whichcote, *Select sermons* (London, 1698).

¹³ Felix Paknadel, 'Shaftesbury's illustrations of *Characteristics*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), 290-312.

composed during his several reclusive periods of repose must be understood in relation to his public writings on the question of government in church and state.

The novel strength of the Revolutionary settlement, argued Shaftesbury, was that it guaranteed inward freedom of thought while regulating outward worship to express belonging within the Christian commonwealth of whig England. His defence of the national established church was not one of a prudent ruler seeking to support social hierarchy but sniggering within the privacy of the lodge. It was one of a writer firmly in the Reformed tradition. Roman Catholics could not be true citizens of the commonwealth as they existed under the yoke of popish priests. Roman Catholic priests were ‘spiritual conquerors’ whose superstitions, bearing no resemblance to the primitive gospel, had enabled ‘priestly government’ and ‘independency on the civil magistrate’.¹⁴ Shaftesbury’s project was to continue stripping away those accretions that had enabled the popish ‘political model and subservient system of divinity’.¹⁵ Secular control over the church establishment would restrict clergymen to their proper function. They would maintain the ‘external worship’ and ‘outward forms’ mandated by the civil magistrate in accordance with the gospel.¹⁶ The dictates of ‘abundant charity and brotherly love’, not ‘steel, fire, gibbets, rods’, would be the themes of ‘religious pastors’.¹⁷ Clergymen were to be learned in the scriptures to guide their flocks and prevent the commonwealth from backsliding into superstition or enthusiasm.

Shaftesbury believed himself to stand alongside ‘just conformists to the lawful church’ in support of the royal supremacy.¹⁸ He reminded defenders of the idea of a distinct Anglican society that the ‘letters patent’ of the godly prince provided ‘commission’ for ministers.¹⁹ The claim to priestly superiority on religiously exclusive grounds represented mere imposture and rested on ‘wilful ignorance and blind idolatry for having taken opinions upon trust and consecrated... certain idol-notions’.²⁰ Sacerdotalism would be replaced by two key priestly capacities. First, ministers would act as the learned *primus inter pares* of the priesthood of all believers. The universities would train clergymen who would approach the Bible rationally and in Erasmian spirit without the aid of scholastic nonsenses, ‘those Riddles of the School-Men’.²¹ Ministers would be educated in the languages in which scripture was

¹⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 378-9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²¹ Shaftesbury to Michael Ainsworth, 24 February 1706, in Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Several letters written by a noble lord to a young man at the university* (London, 1716), p. 3.

composed. They would analyse with scepticism the heated debates of church councils. Second, clergymen would be pastoral and worldly. They would not obsess about the irrelevant metaphysics of another world but prepare their flocks for it by means of good conduct in the current one. They would guide individuals in rationally and independently reading scripture. These learned and pastoral themes recurred frequently in Shaftesbury's correspondence with Michael Ainsworth, the undergraduate and future clergyman at University College, Oxford, to whom Shaftesbury served as patron. Shaftesbury warned Ainsworth that 'steadiness in honesty, good principles, moderation, and true Christianity' were now set 'at defiance by the far greater part and numbers of that body of clergy called the Church of England, who no more esteem themselves a Protestant church'.²²

Shaftesbury's religious writings were a contribution to the whig low-church dispute with tory high-churchmanship. Lawrence Klein has demonstrated that Shaftesbury perceived his project in *Characteristics* as a partisan effort to defend the Revolution settlement. Klein cast Shaftesbury's project as primarily cultural: an effort to align the whigs with ideals of civility, sociability, and politeness against tory fears of toleration for the descendants of puritans and king-killers. His cultural project was comparable with that of Addison and Steele in *The Spectator*.²³ Enclosing a manuscript copy of the *Characteristics* in a letter to Somers, Shaftesbury explained his project by reference to the tory and high-church party. He recounted how 'their sovereignty in arts and sciences, their presidents in letters, their alma maters and academies, have been acknowledged and taken for granted'. However, Shaftesbury continued, though they had 'treated the poor Presbyterians as impolite, unformed, without rival literature or manners', they might be 'somewhat moved to find themselves treated in the same way, not as corrupters of merely of morals and public principles, but as the very reverse or antipodes to good breeding, scholarship, behaviour, sense, and manners'.²⁴

Whigs took the vitality of high-church ecclesiology as evidence that the Reformation was not secure and the established church still needed to be purged of priestcraft. The thinker to whom whigs owed the concept of priestcraft to describe the means with which priests sought spiritual power and political domination was Harrington. It is a well-established claim that Shaftesbury was a neo-Harringtonian thinker, one of a group of whigs who reinterpreted

²² Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 11 May 1711, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 434.

²³ See Lawrence E. Klein, 'Shaftesbury, politeness and the politics of religion', in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Phillipson and Skinner, p. 283; *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-14, 20-1, 121-53.

²⁴ Shaftesbury to Somers, 30 March 1711, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 432.

Harrington's political thought in a monarchical context. Klein has shown that Shaftesbury's whiggish project in *Characteristics* can be situated within the neo-Harringtonian 'civic mode' in which a free self-governing community led by public virtue overcame the threats to liberty posed by the court, nobility, and church.²⁵ Yet the coordinates of neo-Harringtonianism have been understood as primarily secular, determined by autonomy, liberty, and virtue.²⁶ To secure Revolution principles, Shaftesbury is perceived as transforming Harrington's republic of armed freeholder-citizens into a commonwealth of discoursing gentlemen. Whereas Harrington's key safeguard against tyranny was an armed militia, Shaftesbury's was polite manners. Yet in the Christian commonwealth of whig England, the parish clergyman was as much a public officeholder as the Justice of the Peace and the overseer of the poor. Klein further argued that Shaftesbury's religious writings sought to replace ecclesiastical domination in public discourse with gentlemanly cultural norms.²⁷ But Shaftesbury's project was as much about religion and ecclesiology as culture. The removal of fire-and-brimstone rhetoric from the public sphere was part of Shaftesbury's vision of polite society. But this did not imply the removal of clerical discourse. Rightly oriented, learned and pastoral clergymen played a role in polite culture.

To generate such a vision, Shaftesbury needed to identify what had gone wrong. In *Oceana* and later pamphlets, Harrington provided a formulation to demonstrate that the distribution of power necessarily followed the distribution of property.²⁸ Since this was no different for matters spiritual, it followed that priestcraft was not a purely Christian phenomenon. It was an intrinsic feature of any society where priests operated beyond the control of the civil power. Both men wrote histories of priestcraft that began in ancient Egypt and continued into the post-Reformation church. It was, Shaftesbury wrote, in Egypt, 'the motherland of superstition', that 'first religion grew unsociable'.²⁹ The hereditary caste of Egyptian priests developed a private interest in the creation of false superstitions on which depended lay contributions of land and wealth. As the priesthood expanded, more numerous became the artifices. Egyptian priestcraft exemplified the Harringtonian insight that 'dominion must naturally follow property'.³⁰ Shaftesbury concluded that, 'according to political arithmetic, in every nation whatsoever... *the quantity of superstition... will in*

²⁵ Klein, 'Shaftesbury, politeness and the politics of religion', pp. 287-8.

²⁶ Goldie, 'Civil religion of James Harrington', p. 212.

²⁷ Klein, 'Shaftesbury, politeness and the politics of religion', pp. 284-5.

²⁸ James Harrington, *The political works of James Harrington*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 602, 762.

²⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 357.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 359-60.

proportion nearly answer the number of priests, diviners, soothsayers, prophets, or such who gain their livelihood or receive advantages of officiating in religious affairs'.³¹ The power of the Egyptian priesthood became so great that it threatened the monarchy. It was not surprising that 'we should find the property and power of the Egyptian priesthood in ancient days arrived to such a height as in a manner to have swallowed up the state and monarchy'.³²

The dangers of Egyptian priestcraft were not only related to sovereignty. Shaftesbury noted how the logic of Egyptian religion led to violence and persecution. As the 'proportion of so many laymen to each priest grew every day less and less, so the wants and necessities of each priest must grow more and more'. Increasingly belligerent priests forced the civil magistrate to resign 'his title or share of right in things sacred'. The civil magistrate 'could no longer govern as he pleased in these affairs or check the growing number of these professors'. The priests were not content with scholarly study or tending the flocks. Nor were they dependent on the revenues of secular taxation for their livelihood. Their wealth and power turned on their ability to 'heighten the zeal of worshippers'. Priests needed to 'foment their emulation, prefer worship to worship, faith to faith and turn the spirit of enthusiasm to the side of sacred horror, religious antipathy and mutual discord between worshippers'. Priests gave the lie of exclusive religious knowledge, terrifying the gulled poor into a Manichean world of truth and error, and 'provinces and nations were divided by the most contrary rites and customs which could be devised in order to create the strongest aversion possible'.³³

Shaftesbury's analysis of the political threat of the priesthood revealed how neo-Harringtonian politics lent themselves to a Protestant conception of correct church-state relations. Shaftesbury followed Harrington in identifying the Egyptian model of priestcraft as the basis for all later corrupt forms of priestliness and recounted how it had found its way into the Christian world. Harrington's history of the power of the church equated to a history of its wealth and landholdings. Since the times of the early church, priests had used their spiritual power over the laity to generate false superstitions and dupe them into obeisance.³⁴ By such means, they aggrandised material wealth and threatened the sovereignty of the secular ruler. This history of Roman Catholic superstition and priestly usurpation had continued into the last days of the pre-Reformation church.³⁵ Harrington's analysis brought a powerful new dimension to bear on standard Protestant histories of the Reformation. Alongside wresting

³¹ Ibid., p. 358.

³² Ibid., p. 359.

³³ Ibid., p. 364.

³⁴ Harrington, *Political works*, pp. 386, 845.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 372, 537.

spiritual dominion from the dark forces of popery, Harrington also believed that Henry VIII subjected the Church of England materially to the powers of the state. The dissolution of the monasteries and release of ecclesiastical lands to lay holders undermined the economic base of the church's political power.³⁶

Similarly, Shaftesbury traced the Egyptian model of priestcraft into Roman Catholicism. 'The infection spreads' to modern times and 'nations now profane one to another war fiercer and, in religion's cause, forget humanity'.³⁷ Making use of the Cambridge theologian John Spencer's *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus* (1685), Shaftesbury explained how the ancient Hebrews had imitated Egyptian priestcraft.³⁸ The infection, as Shaftesbury termed it, passed to the Magi priests of the Zoroastrians in Persia, who, upon the death of Emperor Cambyses in BC 521, usurped the throne and reigned until they were removed by Darius I.³⁹ It reached Ethiopia and Mesopotamia.⁴⁰ It was the eventual fate of the religion of pagan Rome. In a standard Protestant allusion to the corruptions of the pre-Reformation Christian church, Shaftesbury recalled how the pagan priests of ancient Rome maintained their dominion by means of 'the retaining laws or statutes of mortmain'. They were 'left in this manner as a bottomless gulf and devouring receptacle of land and treasure'.⁴¹ Imperial conquest spread Christian priestcraft across the Empire in a 'universal tyranny and oppression over mankind'.⁴²

This analysis left little space for the idea of Constantine as a godly Christian *imperator*. His conversion bequeathed the priestcraft that had plagued late Roman paganism to Christianity. Early Christian priests ensured that the 'Roman emperors, as they grew more barbarous, grew so much the more superstitious'. The 'lands and revenues as well as the numbers of the heathen priests grew daily'. Due to the 'convert-emperor', the 'heathen church lands, with an increase of power, became transferred to the Christian clergy', which was corrupted 'by such riches and authority'.⁴³ The history of the early church, above all its councils, was the history of the continuing corruption of true religion and the domination of priests over the secular power. Shaftesbury observed how 'ably the Roman Christian and

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 405-6, 606-7.

³⁷ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 315.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 360-2. For John Spencer, see Levitin, *Ancient wisdom*, pp. 164-71, 193-4.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 362-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 373.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 372n.

⁴² Ibid., p. 371.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 372.

once catholic church, by the assistance of their converted emperors, proceeded in the establishment of their growing hierarchy'.⁴⁴

Popish creeds, formularies, and vestments were taken directly from the corrupted religion of the late Roman pagans. Christian buildings with their 'external proportions, magnificence of structures, ceremonies, processions, choirs and those other harmonies' continued to 'captivate the eye and ear'. Christians 'displayed religion in a yet more gorgeous habit of temples, statues, paintings, vestments, copes, mitres, purple and the cathedral pomp'.⁴⁵ Every structure and edifice was erected to distract humanity from true worship. Each creed and ritual was calculated to pervert true religion. The dominance of priests represented the inversion of the right relationship between humankind and God. Although the Roman Catholic Church 'cannot but appear in some respect august and venerable', its priests 'are the spiritual conquerors who, like the first Caesars, from small beginnings established the foundations of an almost universal monarchy'.⁴⁶

Shaftesbury's history of priestcraft was depicted in the frontispiece for the third volume of *Characteristics* (figure 1). He dedicated the left half of the main plate to Egypt, depicting Isis seated on a throne and leaning on a sphinx. Following Diodorus Siculus, Shaftesbury had asserted that Isis granted one-third of the country to priests.⁴⁷ Isis held a cornucopia from which coins and jewels descended into the hands of a priestess and into the river. In the river those coins and jewels gave birth to fighting genii holding daggers as a grimacing ensign looked on in reproach. To depict the inheritance of the ancient Hebrews, the young Moses carried away jewels borrowed from Egypt in the centre of the plate. Rome was symbolised by a temple with a cupola, trophies, and a standard-bearer. The Christian church in Rome was represented by a genius wearing imperial robes and holding a sword pointed downward to signify victory. Below the Roman legionary eagle of the ensign stood both a cross and the Old and New Testaments. The medieval church was symbolised by a Gothic temple and a king both crowned and armed. The crown was made of spires and cupolas of churches. A canopy, over the head of the king, was embroidered with crossed flaming swords and a thunderbolt. Offerings of jewels, medals, sceptres, coronets, and fasces stood at the king's feet. In the top border, Shaftesbury represented the tyranny of the Roman church over the civil power using the emblems of a tiara, crozier, and a flaming sword. A crown, sceptre,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 377.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 378.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 359.

and magistrate's sword stood at the foot of the altar. The lower border contrasted the harmony and concord of civil government with the violence of ecclesiastical tyranny by showing an altar surrounded by instruments of torture. As priestcraft progressed, ancient monuments were shown collapsing as day fell into night and the faces of Ignorance and Stupidity looked on.



Figure 1: frontispiece for the third volume of *Characteristics*

A function of the church's growing strength in ancient Rome was its success in uniting theology with philosophy. The 'schools of the ancient philosophers, which had been long in their decline, came now to be dissolved and their sophistic teachers became ecclesiastical instructors'. Thus 'the unnatural union of religion and philosophy' was completed and 'the monstrous product of this match', scholasticism, 'appeared soon in the

world'.⁴⁸ The Roman Catholic Church never forgot how to comprehend the 'seeming contrarieties of human passion' into their models of divinity and politics.⁴⁹ True Christians attempted to resist the spiritual tyranny. The Reformation marked the first successful attempt to beat back the power of popery when scholasticism was identified as the ideology of spiritual tyranny. The Erasmian impulses of later Reformers would combine with their Erastian programmes to restore true religion by the right church-state relationship. The keys of heaven would be wrestled from the hands of the priests and given by the secular magistrate to the laity. The power of the sword would keep ministers in their true place as investigators of the scriptures. Thus, Shaftesbury might have chosen to conclude his neo-Harringtonian history of priestcraft.

Reformed ecclesiology in the Christian commonwealth of whig England

But Shaftesbury believed popish priestcraft still to exist in whig England. He levelled the accusation in the illustrative plate for *The moralists* (figure 2). Shaftesbury represented Anglican divines wearing gowns, a buttoned vest, petticoat, hanging sleeves, and broad-brimmed hat. His agents printed symbols of the Roman church in the form of a tiara, the cap of a cardinal, a pectoral cross, and tassels.⁵⁰ If Shaftesbury was adapting neo-Harringtonianism to Revolution principles to provide for an independent community governed by public virtue, his project had ecclesiastical implications. In secular politics, civic virtue was transformed from the independence of the armed freeholder-citizen to the polite and sociable discourse of the liberty-loving whig gentleman. Notwithstanding his longstanding associations with court whigs like Somers, Shaftesbury agonised about the threats of corruption and dependence to virtue and the common good. He feared that 'some of our noble countrymen, who come with high advantage and a worthy character into the public' could fall victim to the venality of '[e]quipages, titles, precedencies, staffs, ribbons, and other such glittering ware' that 'are taken in exchange for inward merit, honour and a character'.⁵¹ If the once-virtuous whig ruler fell to corruption, the disapprobation and raillery of the polite gentlemanly classes were the salve. For, 'till our gentleman is become wholly prostitute and shameless', explained Shaftesbury, 'he must in good policy avoid those to whom he lies so much exposed and shun that commerce and familiarity which was once his chief delight'.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 373.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 377.

⁵⁰ Paknadel, 'Shaftesbury's illustrations of *Characteristics*', p. 310.

⁵¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 410.

⁵² Ibid., p. 412.

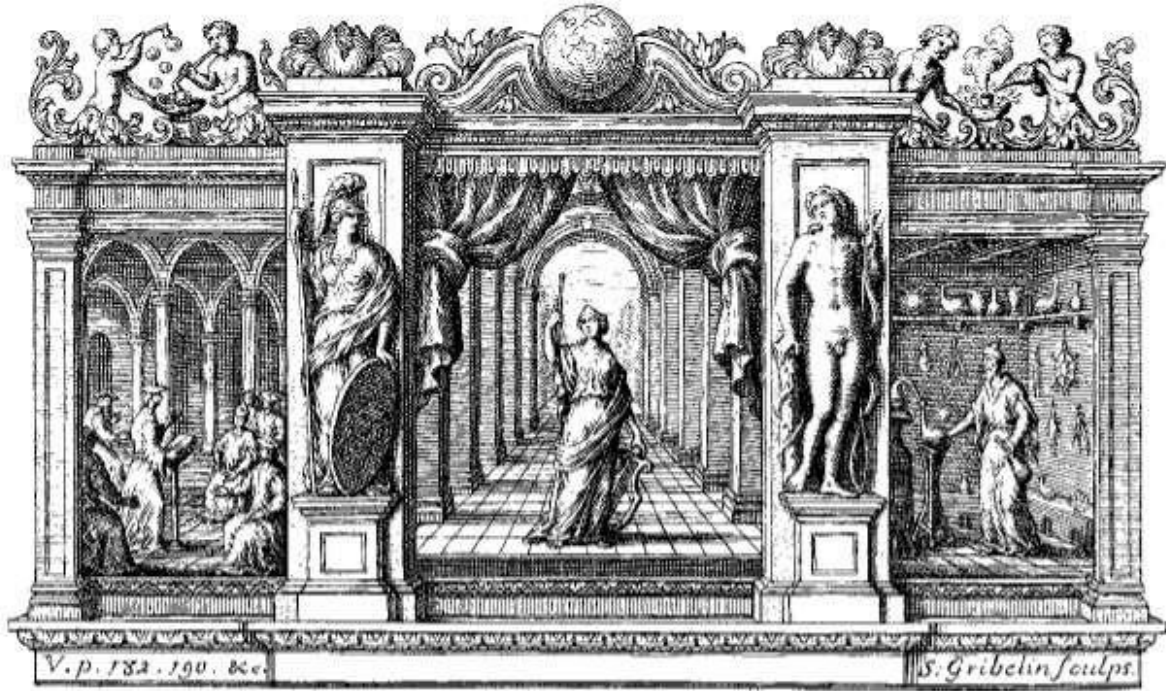


Figure 2: illustrative plate for ‘The moralists’ in the second volume of *Characteristics*

In parish, county, and parliament, virtuous officeholders were the agents of the whig commonwealth. Meanwhile, clergymen were the public officeholders of its church. The sacerdotal principles of tory high-churchmanship represented the religious dimension of the same threat posed by over-weaning nobility and royal absolutism. Shaftesbury saw a direct relationship between being ‘a noted friend to liberty in Church and State’.⁵³ He sought to attack those ‘new pretenders’ of the bishop of Rome with their ‘petty tyrannies and mimical polities’.⁵⁴ As in confronting the dangers of secular tyranny, the raillery of polite gentlemen would guard against spiritual tyranny. The gravity of superstitious impostors would fall in the face of the ‘wit and humour’ that ‘are corroborative of religion and promotive of true faith’. Despite ‘the dark complexion and sour humour of some religious teachers’, Shaftesbury continued, ‘we may be justly said to have, in the main, a witty and good-humoured religion’.⁵⁵ The civility and politeness that would mark the whig commonwealth would mean that ‘imposture has no privilege’. Neither ‘the power of a nobility, nor the awfulness of a church’ would prevent the pursuit of liberty.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., p. 411.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 380.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

Imposture would be replaced not only by gentlemanly culture but also by the ecclesiology of the Reformed state. Anglican priests might arrogantly affect to legitimacy by claims of apostolic inheritance and sacerdotal power. They ‘strive to give themselves the same air of independency on the civil magistrate’ as Roman Catholic priests.⁵⁷ But the first shots against imposture were fired during the sixteenth century. In a letter to Somers, Shaftesbury praised ‘our good Reformers of early times’.⁵⁸ Thanks to the Reformation, agents of popery ‘raise the highest ridicule in the eyes of those who have real discernment and can distinguish originals from copies’.⁵⁹ The theme of securing the Reformation against high-churchmanship recurred in Shaftesbury’s correspondence with Ainsworth. Shaftesbury was concerned that Ainsworth’s attendance at Oxford in preparation for his ordination would corrupt his Christianity. He warned Ainsworth to ‘avoid the Conceit and Pride, which is almost naturally inherent to the Function and Calling you are about to undertake’. He should never think of himself ‘in the Presence of another, *That you are holier than he*’.⁶⁰

The legitimacy of the ministry derived entirely from the sovereign magisterial state. Ainsworth would benefit from paying less attention to patristics and the debates of church councils than to the secular laws governing a church created by human hands. Since the Henrician Reformation, modern clergy relied on a ‘modester title to express their voluntary negotiation between us and Heaven’. It was ‘not immediately from God himself, but through the magistrate’ that clergymen were appointed above the laity. The magisterial Reformation had left priests with ‘legal charter and character, legal titles and precedencies, legal habits, coats of arms, colours, badges’. Anglican clergymen should ‘consider that a thousand badges or liveries by men merely can never be sufficient to entitle them to the same authority as theirs who bore the immediate testimony and miraculous signs of power from above’.⁶¹ The apostles might have enjoyed divine commission and shown their spiritual superiority by wielding miracles. But for the claim that this commission had been inherited there was no scriptural sanction.

As part of his Erastian defence of the superiority of the civil magistrate, Shaftesbury made direct reference to the magisterial theme of the godly prince. Shaftesbury taunted his opponents to demonstrate their divine legitimacy: ‘where shall we find this commission to have lain? How often divided, even in one and the same species of claimants? What party are

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 379.

⁵⁸ Shaftesbury to Somers, 26 May 1710, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 420.

⁵⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 379.

⁶⁰ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 30 December 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 43.

⁶¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 480-1.

they among moderns who, by virtue and of any immediate testimonial from Heaven, are thus entitled? Where are the letters patent? The credentials?’⁶² It was ‘by the prince or sovereign power here on earth, that these gentlemen agents are appointed, distinguished and set over us’.⁶³ All ‘the Preheminence, Wealth, or Pension, which you receive, or expect to receive’, he explained to Ainsworth ‘by Help of this assum’d Character, is from the Publick, whence both the Authority and Profit is derived; and on which it legally depends’.⁶⁴

Shaftesbury defended his arguments by making reference to contemporary low-church and whig scholarship on the church-state relationship. Although Shaftesbury had his differences with Tindal in questions of philosophy, for he believed Tindal to share the moral egoism of Hobbes, he praised ‘Dr. Tindal’s principles... as to church government’.⁶⁵ Another intellectual resource was Bishop Burnet, in whose diocese was situated Shaftesbury’s estate. Burnet was recommended reading for Ainsworth. The seminarian should prioritise Burnet’s *An exposition of the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England* (1699). ‘None can better explain the Sense of the Church, than one, who is the greatest Pillar of it since the first Founders’, Shaftesbury maintained. Burnet was ‘one, who best explain’d and asserted the Reformation it self’, and who ‘was chiefly instrumental in saving it from Popery before and at the Revolution’.⁶⁶ Shaftesbury was encouraged that Ainsworth, upon leaving Oxford, came to enjoy the bishop’s favour. Now ‘the time is come that you are to receive full orders’, it was fortuitous that it should come from ‘the hand of our worthy, great, excellent Bishop’.⁶⁷

It was in a similar ecclesiological mode that Shaftesbury was primarily receiving Harrington. However much Harrington may now be interpreted as a secular writer, Shaftesbury explained early in *Characteristics* that it was a ‘notable author of our nation’ who had defended the idea of a national church establishment. Harrington had aimed to reconstruct the insight of ‘ancient policy’, Shaftesbury claimed, that ‘a people should have a “public leading” in religion’.⁶⁸ He advised Ainsworth that Harrington was ‘most sincere to Virtue and Religion, and even to the Interest of our Church’. Shaftesbury complained that ‘many of our Modern Assertors of Toleration have seemed to leave us destitute of what he calls a *Publick Leading*, or *Ministry*; which Notion he [Harrington] treats as mere

⁶² Ibid, p. 481.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 480.

⁶⁴ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 30 December 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *ibid.*, pp. 38-9. For Tindal, see Dmitri Levitin, ‘Matthew Tindal’s *Rights of the Christian church* (1706) and the church-state relationship’, *Historical journal*, 54:3 (2011), 717-40.

⁶⁶ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 5 May 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 11 May 1711, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 434.

⁶⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 11.

Enthusiasm, or horrid Irreligion'. These intriguing sentences show that, for theorists of civil religion, toleration and the national church were mutually compatible. Shaftesbury explained that 'in truth, Religion cannot be left thus to shift for itself, without Care and Countenance of the Magistrate'.⁶⁹ To deny 'the magistrate a worship or take away a national church is as mere enthusiasm as the notion which sets up persecution'. The public role of the church establishment was to underpin enlightened, tolerant, and polite society. It would provide for external worship for the civil commonwealth while maintaining the Protestant commitment to toleration. 'Why', asked Shaftesbury, 'should there not be public walks as well as private gardens. Why not public libraries as well as private education and home tutors?'⁷⁰ A benign national establishment whose clerical agents were to discourage superstition and enthusiasm would encourage morality, piety, and peace.

Much of this vision relied on a distinction between public piety and private introspection. Shaftesbury argued by means of analogy that it would be difficult 'if religion, as by law established, were not allowed the same privilege as heraldry'. Gentlemen commonly agreed that 'particular persons may design or paint, in their private capacity, after what manner they think fit, but they must blazon only as the public directs'.⁷¹ Grean has suggested that this claim was made ironically.⁷² However, once it is understood within the framework of Shaftesbury's distinction between private introspection and public piety, its meaning becomes clear. Shaftesbury repeated the point by means of another analogy in writing that 'Naturalists may, in their separate and distinct capacity, inquire as they think fit into the real existence and natural truth of things, but they must by no means dispute the authorized forms'.⁷³ External worship was a crucial expression of belonging within the Christian commonwealth.

Scholarship, pastoralia, and politeness

An intrinsic aspect of a public leading in religion was Christian ministry. The national established church would rely on a learned clergy steeped in polite and gentlemanly learning. A *sine qua non* would be the primacy of philosophy in the secular sphere, thereby undoing the success of scholastics in uniting theological sophistry with philosophy. Shaftesbury lamented how philosophy 'is no longer active in the world nor can hardly, with any

⁶⁹ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 5 May 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 36.

⁷⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷² Grean, *Shaftesbury's philosophy*, pp. 117-18.

⁷³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 61.

advantage, be brought upon the public stage'. Modern society has 'immured her, poor lady, in colleges and cells and have set her servilely to such works as those in the mines'.⁷⁴

Philosophy belonged to men of the current world. Since it was 'the study of happiness', Shaftesbury asked, 'must not everyone, in some manner or other, either skilfully or unskilfully philosophize?'⁷⁵ Happiness was the remit of this world. The study of the next world belonged to clergymen and, rightly oriented, they would properly serve the lay believer in preparing for it. Theology was the remit of clergymen. 'Christian theology, the birth, procedure, generation and personal distinction of the Divinity' were 'mysteries only to be determined by the initiated or ordained, to whom the State has assigned the guardianship and promulgation of the divine oracles'.⁷⁶ These 'lawful superiors' were tasked with the exploration of scripture and it was the duty of lay believers to worship outwardly in accordance with their interpretations. Clergymen rightly 'teach us what we are to own and perform in worship' and 'we are dutiful in complying with them'.⁷⁷

Shaftesbury symbolised the importance of separating philosophy from theology in the frontispiece to the title-page of the first edition of *Characteristics* (figure 3). The plate showed two opened scrolls and two opened books with pens and torches in the border. The domination of the clergy in philosophy and theology was represented in the plate introducing *The moralists* in the third volume of *Characteristics* (figure 2). The left side of the triptych showed the interior of a college with professors and scholars dressed in modern academic caps and gowns. Half of the boys demonstrated the value of such false philosophy by making bubbles while the other half blew into a pan of coal using a crucible.

Shaftesbury's conception of learned ministry implied concern for the universities. John Gascoigne has demonstrated how a combination of Newtonian science and Anglicanism was achieved in some Cambridge colleges during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁸ Crucial aspects of this curriculum included a commitment to study the scriptures alone and to treat with scepticism the interpretations of church councils and scholastics. Shaftesbury believed the goal of the next generation of clergymen should be to purge the church of schoolmen who, 'in the last Ages of the Church, found an effectual Way to destroy Religion by Philosophy, and render Reason and Philosophy ridiculous, under what Garb they had put

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 232.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 336.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 301.

⁷⁸ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*.

in it'.⁷⁹ Philological training was an essential tool. He recommended an understanding of pagan literature, including philosophy, poetry, plays, and comedies, to appreciate the linguistic and historical circumstances in which scripture had been composed.⁸⁰ Knowledge of ancient Greek aided understanding the New Testament and the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible. The 'Greek Language' was one of 'the *Foundations of Learning*, and the Source and Fountain of those Lights we have, whether in *Morality* or *Divinity*'.⁸¹



Figure 3: frontispiece for the title-page of *Characteristics*

The supreme difficulties of theological interpretation required learned preachers. Otherwise, the layman might find recourse in mechanic preachers. Clerical learning had a practical and worldly use. It was not simply Christ's injunction to propagate Christianity around the world but it was the entire purpose for which the secular civil magistrate

⁷⁹ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 24 February 1706, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 438-9.

⁸¹ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 28 January 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 20.

appointed ministers of the gospel. The role of the clergy extended far beyond conceptions of prudent statecraft. A church establishment might render a people governable, Shaftesbury argued, but the nightmare of a Hobbesian covenant showed the dangers of political ministry. He was concerned that clerical preaching in some countries ‘has not been appropriated to Spirituals’ and ‘a great part of those Divine Exhortations have had something in common with the Policies of the World, and the Affairs of Government’. Politically-motivated preaching concerned Shaftesbury because ‘it must be own’d that *Preaching* it self will be so much the less apt to make any happy Revolution in Manners, as it has at any time been serviceable to Revolutions in State, or to the support of any other Interest than that of Christ’s Kingdom’. Among the writers to whom Shaftesbury apportioned blame for ‘Building a Political Christianity’ stood Hobbes, who ‘has done but very ill Service in the Moral World’. However much ‘other parts of Philosophy may be obliged to him, *Ethicks* will appear to have no great share in the Obligation’.⁸² Clergymen were endowed by the state because it was the function of the godly commonwealth to pursue the promise of the primitive gospel. They were not simply the tool of the statesman.

The clergy would prioritise their pastoral and pedagogical duties. Shaftesbury invoked William Davenant’s epic poem *Gondibert* (1651), lamenting that the poet ‘never dreamt of a time when the very countenance of moderation should be out of fashion with the gentlemen of this order’.⁸³ Once clergymen embraced their responsibility to act as virtuous exemplars, lay believers might justifiably place their faith in the interpretations and teachings of their spiritual guides. The layman ‘is no critic nor competently learned in these originals’. It was plain that ‘he can have no original judgement of his own but must rely still on the opinion of those who have opportunity to examine such matters, and whom he takes to be the unbiased and disinterested judges of these religious narratives’. The faith of the average believer ‘is not in ancient facts or persons, nor in the ancient writ of primitive recorders, nor in the successive collators or conservators of these records’. Rather, ‘his confidence and trust must be in those modern men, or societies of men, to whom the public or he himself ascribes the judgment of these records and commits the determination of sacred writ and genuine story’.⁸⁴ As Shaftesbury explained to Somers in 1705, the national church must prevent those ‘unhappy

⁸² Shaftesbury, ‘Preface’, in Whichcote, *Select sermons*, p. xxiv.

⁸³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 482.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

bigots, breaking out of the common road of religion, [who] are entangled in by-paths and deeper in the briars than before'.⁸⁵

Pedagogical ministry involved preaching the primitive basics. Through the simple moral lessons of primitive Christianity, the clergy might cultivate virtue. In the preface to his edition of sermons by Whichcote, Shaftesbury claimed that Christianity was 'a Religion so full of all good Precepts, and so enforcing with respect to all the Duties of Morality, and Justice' that 'our Amazement ought rather to be; how Men, with such a Religion' should lead lives of 'Malice, Hatred, or Division'.⁸⁶ Another exemplar of pastoral churchmanship was Burnet, who was 'now the truest example of *Laborious, Primitive, Pious, and Learned Episcopacy*'.⁸⁷ Alongside Shaftesbury's emphasis on scripture stood his classicising impulse. Whig England was to revive the achievement of ancient Greece where priestcraft had not triumphed. Shaftesbury wished to design the 'modern world' on the 'ancient model' of the Greeks in politics, culture, and religion. Much like the Greeks, Shaftesbury aspired to descend from 'the higher regions of divinity' to 'plain honest morals'.⁸⁸ Religion would be geared not towards the pursuit of mysteries. Virtue, friendship, and honesty stood alongside religion, piety, adoration, and 'a generous surrender of [the] mind to whatever happens from that supreme cause or order of things'.⁸⁹

To secure learned and pastoral ministry, theology needed to be mediated by politeness. Theological propositions were to be put to the test in the context of good-humoured raillery. Theological debate was intrinsic to Shaftesbury's plea in *Characteristics* 'for sociability, complacency and good humour in religion'.⁹⁰ As Shaftesbury wrote, 'there can be no rational belief but where comparison is allowed, examination permitted and a sincere toleration established'. If a belief were 'in any measure consonant to truth and reason', it would 'find as much favour in the eyes of mankind as truth and reason need desire'.⁹¹ Once again, the importance of distinguishing between inward introspection and public piety mattered in ensuring the integrity of the divine oracles and their interpreters. In a letter to the printer John Darby in 1702, Shaftesbury thus commended Pierre Bayle: 'Whatever his opinions might be, either in politics or philosophy (for no two ever disagreed more in these than he and I), yet we lived and corresponded as entire friends.' Shaftesbury

⁸⁵ Shaftesbury to Somers, 20 October 1705, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 338.

⁸⁶ Shaftesbury, 'Preface', in Whichcote, *Select sermons*, sig. A3.

⁸⁷ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 5 May 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

felt the need to ‘do him the justice to say that whatever he might be in speculation, he was in practice one of the best Christians, and almost the only man I ever knew who, professing philosophy, loved truly as a philosopher; with that innocence, virtue and temperance, humility, and contempt of the world and interest which might be called exemplary’.⁹²

Toleration by the regulation of the passions

Shaftesbury’s established national church was therefore tolerant. His vision was a conscious development of defences of toleration among seventeenth-century divines, especially those at Cambridge. The writings of Jeremy Taylor, bishop of Down and Connor during the Restoration, were ‘in the front of this order of authors’.⁹³ He advised Ainsworth to pay particular attention to Chillingworth and his *The religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation* (1637), which had become a central text in defending *sola scriptura* divinity. ‘CHILLINGWORTH *against Popery*’, Shaftesbury intoned, ‘is sufficient Reading for you, and will teach you the best Manner of that Polemick Divinity’.⁹⁴ Shaftesbury lauded Whichcote for his ‘happy Temper, and God-like Disposition, which he labour’d to inspire’.⁹⁵ He praised the ‘pious and learned’ Cudworth.⁹⁶ More was ‘a learned and good man’.⁹⁷ These writers recommended themselves by balancing the polarities of spiritual liberty and the vernacular availability of the Bible with the stability afforded by an established church. Such was the example of Tillotson who, in his *Rule of faith* (1666), accepted that scripture would always be interpreted differently, since all men and institutions were ‘plainly fallible and subject to error and mistake’. Protestants should instead emphasise the spiritual basics common to all. Tillotson ‘shows plainly how great a shame it is for us Protestants at least... to disallow difference of opinions and forbid private examinations and search into matters of ancient record and Scriptural tradition’.⁹⁸

A facet of Shaftesbury’s praise for tolerationist modes of Restoration and post-Revolutionary Anglican divinity was their concern for moderation. The Church of England continued to position itself as a *via media* between the superstition of the Catholic Church of Rome and the enthusiasm of Calvinist Geneva. ‘Our Bishops and Dignify’d Church-men, (the

⁹² Shaftesbury to John Darby, 2 February 1706, in Shaftesbury, *Life*, p. 385.

⁹³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 476.

⁹⁴ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 5 May 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 34.

⁹⁵ Shaftesbury, ‘Preface’, in Whichcote, *Select sermons*, p. xxxi.

⁹⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 264.

⁹⁷ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 30 December 1709, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, p. 43.

⁹⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 479, 477. Shaftesbury referred specifically to Tillotson’s *Rule of faith* (1666) cited in the edition of Tillotson’s *The works of the most reverend Dr. John Tillotson* (London, 1707), p. 677.

most worthily and justly Dignify'd of any in any Age,)', Shaftesbury explained to Ainsworth, 'are, as they ever were, inclinable to Moderation in the high *Calvinistick* Points'. They were also 'inclinable to Moderation in other Points'. The essential point was that 'THEY are for Toleration, *inviolable Toleration*'. Opponents of such moderation in the tory and high-church party 'despise the Gentleness of their Lord and Master' as well as 'the sweet mild Government of our QUEEN'. Their religion was 'that abominable Blasphemous Representative of Church Power, attended with the worst of Temporal Governments, as we see it in Perfection of each Kind in FRANCE'.⁹⁹

Shaftesbury believed that religion and its subversions in the forms of superstition and enthusiasm were each natural passions. The motion of the passion of religion, 'when unguided and left wholly to itself, is in its nature turbulent'. Once 'the reins are let loose', the mind 'as far as it is able to act or think in such a state, approves the riot and justifies the wild effects by the supposed sacredness of the cause'.¹⁰⁰ The result was superstition or enthusiasm. Borrowing from Cicero, Shaftesbury identified 'superstition or ill custom' as the condition in which men forgot their natural benevolence.¹⁰¹ This was the achievement of priestcraft in mispresenting the divinity, for 'the ill character of a god does injury to the affections of men and disturbs and impairs the natural sense of right and wrong'.¹⁰² Shaftesbury owed the identification of enthusiasm as a natural passion in particular to Cambridge divines like Whichcote and More.¹⁰³ He claimed his arguments were far 'from degrading enthusiasm or disclaiming it in himself that he looks on this passion, simply considered, as the most natural, and its object as the justest, in the world'.¹⁰⁴ But he believed enthusiasm needed to be restrained so that it did not produce tumultuous consequences. While it did not approve of its theology or ecclesiology, the Church of England would tolerate Protestant Dissent and the priesthood would act as a vanguard against the enthusiastic potential of millennial and apocalyptic thought.

It is worth further considering how Shaftesbury identified religion and its subversions as natural passions. It throws further light onto his religious neo-Harringtonianism. Shaftesbury claimed to follow Harrington in announcing that he sought to understand

⁹⁹ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 24 February 1706, in Shaftesbury, *Several letters*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, pp. 355-6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 181-2.

¹⁰³ For Shaftesbury's place in the critique of enthusiasm during the eighteenth century, see Heyd, *Be sober and reasonable*, pp. 214-27.

¹⁰⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 353.

government through the ‘scheme of the passions’.¹⁰⁵ By the regulation of passions, or ‘this moral kind of architecture’, would emerge a stable commonwealth.¹⁰⁶ The health of the body politic needed to be ordered by study of its ‘inward anatomy’.¹⁰⁷ Virtue was a ‘noble enthusiasm justly directed and regulated by that high standard’ which the citizen ‘supposes in the nature of things’.¹⁰⁸ A public spirit ‘can come only from a social feeling or sense of partnership with humankind’. Thus ‘morality and good government go together’, since there was ‘no real love of virtue without the knowledge of public good’.¹⁰⁹

Shaftesbury believed men acted according to their passions and that reason was necessary to control these impulses. Reason defended the ‘moral fortress’ of the mind from ‘fancy’.¹¹⁰ Reason governed the mind and imagination and aided the development of ‘right opinion’ in the appreciation of philosophical goods by restricting the passions.¹¹¹ It was the inability to regulate these impulses that led to superstition and enthusiasm. By reflecting rationally, man would come to appreciate that he ‘is not only born to virtue, friendship, honesty and faith but to religion, piety, adoration and a generous surrender of his mind to whatever happens from that supreme cause or order of things, which he acknowledges entirely just and perfect’.¹¹²

An established national religion was necessary to direct natural human passions in the pursuit of virtue and the common good. Clergymen would inculcate the natural passion of religion but not those of superstition and enthusiasm. They must work with the civil magistrate ‘by making virtue to be apparently the interest of everyone, so as to remove all prejudices against it, create a fair reception for it and lead men into that path which afterwards they cannot easily quit’.¹¹³ To illustrate his argument, Shaftesbury depicted in the plate for *An inquiry concerning virtue and merit* the image of religion subverted by superstition and enthusiasm (figure 4). In the plate, a sacrificed youth with a cut throat lay at the foot of an altar. Further to the right, a statue of a savage god with the head of a lion and the body of a fox held a dagger and torch. Symbolising cruelty, signs of Scorpio may be discerned in the sky with the mouth of hell. The savage god Cerberus stood in the bottom-right corner with Hydra in the top-right corner of the frame. On the left of the plate were

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 353.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 237.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 422.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 433.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 186.

representations of virtuous theism in the forms of a statue of a fair deity holding an ancient sceptre and leaning on a rudder to steer the globe, and the zodiac sign of Libra, symbolising a well-balanced and harmonious world.



Figure 4: illustrative plate for ‘An inquiry concerning virtue and merit’ in the second volume of *Characteristics*

The arrival of the Camisards, a group of Calvinist millenarians fleeing the French wars of religion provoked by the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, provided Shaftesbury with the opportunity to demonstrate not only the danger of enthusiasm but also how it ought properly to be treated.¹¹⁴ Shaftesbury reminded those who sought to quell the Camisards that enthusiasm when confronted with persecution and uniformity could quickly evolve into ‘gravity’, ‘harsh adversity’, and false claims of authority.¹¹⁵ The solution to enthusiasm should not be persecution. Shaftesbury condemned the ‘fierce unsociable way of modern zealots’ in the tory high-church party. Those ‘starched, gruff gentlemen who guard religion as bullies do a mistress’ gave the modern believer ‘a very indifferent opinion of their lady’s merit and their own wit’ because they allowed it neither to be ‘inspected by others nor

¹¹⁴ For a recent study of the debate caused by the Camisards see Laborie, *Enlightening enthusiasm*, pp. 166-93. See also Hillel Schwartz, *Knaves, fools, madmen and that subtle effluvium: a study of the opposition to the French prophets in England, 1706-1710* (Gainesville, FL, 1978); *The French prophets: the history of a millenarian group in eighteenth-century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980).

¹¹⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 32.

care themselves to examine in a fair light'.¹¹⁶ The natural passion of enthusiasm required a salve rather than an irritant. To apply 'a serious remedy and bring the sword or fasces as a cure must make the case more melancholy and increase the very cause of the distemper'. The magistrate must procure 'a gentler hand'. His tools must not be 'caustics, incisions and amputations' but 'the softest balms'.¹¹⁷ The magistrate ought to deploy 'cheerful ways' in order to regulate 'fancy and speculation' as well as 'men's apprehensions and religious belief or fears'.¹¹⁸

To defend his vision of the Christian commonwealth, Shaftesbury couched Protestant ideas of toleration in classicism. The ancient Greeks provided a model of toleration for superstition and enthusiasm. It was not only 'the visionaries and enthusiasts of all kinds' who were tolerated. It was also 'philosophy [which] had as free a course and was permitted as a balance against superstition'. Some philosophical sects like 'the Pythagorean and latter Platonic' had 'joined in with the superstition and enthusiasm of the times' but others, including 'the Epicurean, the Academic and others', deployed 'the force of wit and raillery against it'. So it was that 'reason had fair play' while 'learning and science flourished'. Because 'superstition and enthusiasm were mildly treated', they were never given the pretext to rage 'to that degree as to occasion bloodshed, wars, persecutions and devastations in the world'.¹¹⁹

Shaftesbury symbolised how the ancient models of philosophy and religion treated superstition and enthusiasm in the frontispiece for the first volume of *Characteristics* (figure 5). Superstition was represented by the Egyptian systrum, the mitre, and the litmus. Enthusiasm was depicted by a phial and cantharus with froth and bubbles emerging in the top border. To demonstrate how reason and science flourished under ancient policy, Shaftesbury inserted a poet laureate and philosophers either reading, holding a globe, debating, or meditating in contemplation. Mathematical instruments stood at the feet of these philosophers and Mount Olympus and Pegasus could be discerned in the background. On the left of the middle of the image stood a group comprising religionists, supplicants, votaries, and prophets. Each were able to worship as they chose. In the top border of the frontispiece, Shaftesbury depicted the flourishing of learning and science.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 246.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Shaftesbury also depicted the early Roman pagans before their later superstitious corruption. He portrayed a consul giving authority to a woman who was wearing a crown, holding a sceptre, and lying at the foot of a tribunal. The woman held scales in her left hand, balancing wisdom, symbolised by the breastplate of Minerva, a caduceus, and a lyre. In the oval frame were symbols of political power in the form of a crown, sceptre, and fasces. Beneath these items were the symbols of religion: an ewer, sacrificing dish, and augur's staff. On the left and right frames stood emblems of learning, such as rolls of ancient volumes, and signs of painting, sculpture, and mathematics. In the worldly tones of political economy, the prosperity of the commonwealth produced by such a tolerant polity was symbolised by ears of corn, a coronet of roses, and festoons of flowers and fruit. Other symbols of prosperity included several cornucopias, vines, and a palace. The lower border represented social harmony in the form of two right hands shaking the other. By these images, Shaftesbury showed religion to have a civil orientation.



Figure 5: frontispiece for the first volume of *Characteristics*

It is particularly noteworthy that Shaftesbury so lauded ancient Greece and early republican Rome for their toleration of philosophy. It is by returning to the question of toleration for philosophers that it becomes possible to appreciate fully the reasons for Shaftesbury's principled commitment to the Reformed church-state. Shaftesbury equated the natural passion of religion with the true religion of primitive Christianity. The gospel message was the basis upon which the religious genius of the ancient Greeks could be reconstructed in modern times. The virtues of primitive Christianity were ideals which anybody, irrespective of inward belief, could rationally uphold. Thus, Shaftesbury's reader was introduced to the instance of a debate in *The moralists* that involved 'a gentleman of some rank, one who was generally esteemed to carry a sufficient caution and reserve in religious subjects of discourse as well as an apparent deference to religion and, in particular, to the national and established church' who was also to make the case for 'an open and free vindication not only of freethinking but free professing and discoursing in matters relating to religion and faith'.¹²⁰ In his preface to the sermons of Whichcote, Shaftesbury explicitly distinguished his position from those who judged 'not only *the Institution of Preaching*, but even the *Gospel* it self, and *our Holy Religion* to be a Fraud'.¹²¹ The expression of freethought need never threaten true religion because no freethinker could rationally disagree with the message of Jesus Christ.

Shaftesbury believed that the two enemies of liberty of thought and freedom of conscience, superstition and enthusiasm, were also enemies of true religion and primitive Christianity. Freethinkers as much as Protestant Dissenters might recall that it was to the consequences of Christian Reform that they owed their spiritual liberty. It was in the shared social practice of external worship inside the national established church that they expressed their citizenship within the Christian commonwealth of whig England. They owed the same 'steady orthodoxy, resignation and entire submission to the truly Christian and catholic doctrines of our Holy Church as by law established' that Shaftesbury believed himself to manifest for principled reasons.¹²² Instead of criticising Christianity *tout court*, Shaftesbury was constructing a modern civil religion inspired by the wisdom of the ancient paganism in Greece and Rome but founded in true religion conceived as primitive Christianity. His ecclesiological materials were those of Christian Reform, especially the magisterial

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 472.

¹²¹ Shaftesbury, 'Preface', in Whichcote, *Select sermons*, unnumbered page.

¹²² Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, p. 471.

Reformation. In syncretising classicism and Protestantism to develop civilised, polite, and enlightened society, Shaftesbury provided for a civil religion with a Christian foundation.

Chapter 3

John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon

The bishop of Bangor's scheme

A central problem of interpretation in church-state relations during the eighteenth century is the legacy of Locke. Lockean theories of toleration tend to be taken as anticipations of the liberal separation between church and state.¹ Trenchard and Gordon stand at the centre of this problem because they are seen as key transmitters of the 'commonwealth' political theory that connected the 'British revolutions' of 1649, 1688, and 1776 through their two series of weekly essays, *The independent whig* (1720-1) and *Cato's letters* (1720-3).² *The independent whig* appeared in America as early as 1724 and was printed as late as 1816. It also appeared during the Enlightenment in France by the militant hand of Baron d'Holbach in 1767.³ Americanists in particular have categorised Trenchard and Gordon rather nebulously as 'libertarians' by their amalgamation of 'Lockeanism' with 'radical' whiggery.⁴ This categorisation takes Trenchard and Gordon's opposition to tory political thought and high-church ecclesiology to imply a total distrust for all clergymen.⁵

Albeit the separationist reading of Locke, by its prolepsis, risks neglecting his relationship with the Restoration and Revolution church establishment, Trenchard and Gordon show the difficulties in appreciating how an Erastian defence of the royal supremacy

¹ This assumption pervades Beiner's *Civil religion*.

² Clinton Rossiter, *The first American Revolution: the American colonies on the eve of independence* (New York, 1956), pp. 224-33; *The political thought of the American Revolution* (New York, 1956), p. 68; *Six characters in search of a republic: studies in the political thought of the American colonies* (New York, 1956), pp. 133, 237; Robbins, *Eighteenth-century commonwealthman*, pp. 111-13; David Jacobson, 'Introduction', in *The English libertarian heritage: from the writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon in The independent whig and Cato's letters* (San Francisco, 1994), pp. lvii-lx; 'Thomas Gordon's *Works of Tacitus* in pre-revolutionary America', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 69 (1965), 58-64; Bernard Bailyn, *The ideological origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge, MA, 1967), pp. 35-7, 44, 53; Pocock, *Machiavellian moment*, pp. 467-77; 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English political thought in the eighteenth century', in *Politics, language and time*, 104-48.

³ Jacobson, 'Introduction', in *English libertarian heritage*, pp. xvii-xix; Ronald Hamowy, 'Cato's letters, John Locke, and the republican paradigm', *History of political thought*, 11:2 (1990), pp. 293-4. Baron d'Holbach published portions of *The independent whig* under the title *L'esprit du clergé ou le Christianisme primitif venge des enterprises et des excès de nos prêtres modernes* in 1767. In 1786, d'Holbach used Trenchard's surname as the author of his own work *Le contagion sacrée*. Five editions of Gordon's translation of Tacitus appeared in France between 1742 and 1762 with a French translation of Gordon's commentaries on Sallust in 1759. Gordon's works on Tacitus and Sallust were both republished during the French Revolution.

⁴ Marie McMahon, *The radical whigs, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon: libertarian loyalists to the new house of Hanover* (Lanham, Md, 1990), pp. 3, 205; Hamowy, 'Cato's letters', pp. 289, 292; 'Foreword', in *English libertarian heritage*, p. ix; 'Introduction', in John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's letters or essays on liberty, civil and religious, and other important subjects*, ed. Ronald Hamowy, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, 1995), I, p. xxi.

⁵ See, for example, Hamowy, 'Introduction', in Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, I, p. xxiii.

over the church could be married with toleration. Andrew Thompson has suggested that it is ‘unclear what Trenchard and Gordon’s views on the relationship between church and state were’ because they seemed ‘equivocal as to whether the best form of church-state relations was that of an Erastian supremacy of the state over the church or a Lockean division’.⁶ By understanding Trenchard and Gordon’s ecclesiastical writings on their own terms and not in exclusive relation to Locke, it will become clear that their position was the former. As whigs and low-churchmen feared that the Revolution settlement of 1689 was at risk from priestly aspirations for asserting the independence of the Church of England from the crown-in-parliament, Trenchard and Gordon launched their defence of civil religion. They argued that the clergymen of the Church were public officeholders of the civil state responsible for preaching the Reformed religion according to their Articles of Faith in order to contribute to the peace of English society.

John Trenchard was a whig politician. In 1722, he was elected Member of Parliament for Taunton. He was a member of those circles of ‘country’ whiggism in which Shaftesbury mingled and, in 1697, penned, with Moyle, *An argument, shewing that a standing army is inconsistent with a free government*. In 1698, he wrote *A short history of standing armies in England*. His first publication on matters of religion came with *The natural history of superstition* (1709). Thomas Gordon was a Scottish whig who became Trenchard’s amanuensis. He published two pamphlets on religious matters at the outset of the controversy caused by Bishop Hoadly and his sermon *The nature of the kingdom, or church, of Christ* (1717). One was *A modest plea for Parson Alberoni* (1717), ironically sub-titled ‘a short but unanswerable defence of priestcraft’. Another was an *Apology for the danger of the church* (1719), which parodied tory high-churchmanship. In 1722, Gordon penned a preface for a translation from the French Huguenot exile and jurist Jean Barbeyrac, who had sought refuge in Germany, entitled *The spirit of ecclesiastics in all ages*. He produced a translation of Publius Cornelius Tacitus in 1728 and the works of Sallust in 1744.

Between 1720 and 1723, Trenchard and Gordon penned their two series of essays at the height of the Bangorian controversy and the South Sea crisis.⁷ In the case of *The independent whig*, Gordon wrote 22 issues whereas Trenchard contributed 18 issues and 3 were written by both men. A further 10 were signed by an unidentified individual, who

⁶ Andrew Thompson, ‘Popery, politics, and private judgement in early Hanoverian Britain’, *Historical journal*, 45:2 (2002), pp. 352-3, 355.

⁷ For the anticlericalism of Trenchard and Gordon in the Bangorian controversy, see Starkie, *Church of England*, pp. 129, 132.

simply signed the issues ‘C’. David Berman has suggested that the freethinker Anthony Collins was the third contributor.⁸ However, this suggestion rests upon primarily circumstantial evidence inferred from Collins’s publishing history, and accusations by non-contemporary opponents of *The independent whig* that Collins was involved in its production.⁹ The association with Collins lends support to the otherwise unsustainable suggestion that Trenchard and Gordon were radically opposed to any form of priestliness. The following analysis assumes that the identity of the third author remains unresolved.

Trenchard and Gordon were theorists of civil religion. They supported the magisterial church-state relationship produced by the Henrician Reformation because it balanced the expression of belonging within the Christian commonwealth of whig England by regulated external worship with the Protestant defence of inward freedom of conscience. They believed toleration and Erastianism were mutually compatible and developed Protestant criticisms of sacerdotal priestliness in opposition to tory high-churchmanship. Only a national established church could restrain priestcraft by dis-incentivising the fabrication of superstitions through offering clergymen a secure living and using pastoral exemplars to preach the basic morality of the primitive gospel. Clergymen would also act as the vanguards against the enthusiasm of the seventeenth-century wars of religion. Trenchard and Gordon’s defence of the church-state relationship owed a great deal to the long Reformation but they also blended it with classicism. They hoped to reconstruct for Christian modernity the insights of ancient Roman paganism by creating a civil religion which served the ends of civilised and prosperous living in this world. By such means, the Christian would become the patriot. Champion has related Trenchard and Gordon’s ‘civil theology’ with Harrington, Molesworth, Moyle, and Toland.¹⁰ But Champion’s emphasis on the republican character of such proposals has, in the case of Trenchard and Gordon, neglected its Anglican dimensions. Their commitment was to the superiority of the civil state in spirituals in general. But they specifically defended the magisterial church-state relationship bequeathed by the Henrician Reformation.

The syncretism between Christian Reform and classicism was also a feature of Trenchard and Gordon’s religious neo-Harringtonianism.¹¹ Study of early Hanoverian politics

⁸ David Berman, ‘Anthony Collins’s essays in the *Independent whig*’, *Journal of the history of philosophy*, 13:4 (1975), 463-9.

⁹ For instance, the orthodox Anglican first President of King’s College, Columbia, Samuel Johnson in *A letter to Mr. Jonathan Dickinson* (Boston, 1747) and the Irish poet and theologian Philip Skelton in *Ophiomaches, or deism revealed* (London, 1749).

¹⁰ Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*, pp. 170-95, 218-9.

¹¹ This analysis challenges Annie Mitchell’s argument that Trenchard and Gordon cannot be described as neo-Harringtonians because they were ‘liberal republicans’ who viewed politics in the same intellectual framework as Mandeville. Mitchell’s argument was based on political not ecclesiastical terms; at most, Mitchell observed

remains dominated by the secular application of neo-Harringtonian thought.¹² The key contexts remain the standing army controversy, the political threat posed by Jacobitism, the South Sea crisis and its aftermath during the 1720s, and the rise of Walpole. But the civic analysis of corruption, virtue, and service for the public good was applied as much to religious politics as the secular sphere. Clergymen were as much public officeholders of the commonwealth as the minister of the crown. They were agents of the civil state and their effort at moral reformation belonged to the same campaign against corruption launched by Trenchard and Gordon during the South Sea crisis.

The Bangorian controversy generated a broader moment of crisis for English whigs. It is now a familiar refrain that the Revolution did not result in the triumph of ‘latitudinarian’ low-churchmanship.¹³ Trenchard and Gordon felt the need to refute tory and high-church sacerdotal Anglicanism during the 1720s because they believed there was an ongoing conspiracy to reverse the legislative changes of 1688-9 and the Hanoverian succession. In a pamphlet entitled *A political dissertation upon bull-baiting and evening lectures. With occasional meditations on the 30th of January* (1718), Gordon attacked annual sermons preached in the martyred memory of Charles I. Instead of an ‘Occasion of Seriousness and Humiliation’ that might have reminded the laity of the dangers of enthusiasm, the sermons were ‘an Annual Remembrance of a National Calamity’ to encourage ‘an abhorrence of the Means which brought it about’ and draw an obvious analogy with resistance to James II.¹⁴ Having lamented that the clergy had so ‘Spirited up’ the ‘Commonality’, Gordon resolved that he and Trenchard must appeal to the same commonality through popular prose.¹⁵

Trenchard and Gordon supported the anticlerical programme of the ministry led by James, Viscount Stanhope, and Charles Spencer, third earl of Sunderland, between 1717 and 1721. The Stanhope-Sunderland ministry suspended convocation in March 1717 and reversed the reforms of Queen Anne tories by repealing the Schism and Occasional Conformity Acts in 1719. Fearful of the ongoing threat of high-church toryism, Trenchard and Gordon accepted proposals usually associated with court whigs such as the Septennial Act of 1716 to stave off the election of tory MPs. The Stanhope-Sunderland ministry was short-lived and

that Trenchard and Gordon, like Mandeville, favoured toleration for Protestant Dissenters. See ‘Character of an independent whig – “Cato” and Bernard Mandeville’, *History of European ideas*, 29:3 (2003), 291-311; ‘A liberal republican Cato’, *American journal of political science*, 48:3 (2004), 588-603.

¹² M. M. Goldsmith, ‘Liberty, virtue, and the rule of law, 1689-1770’, in *Republicanism, liberty, and commercial society*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford, 1994), pp. 203-11; Phillipson, ‘Politics and politeness’.

¹³ See Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*, p. 15, n. 47.

¹⁴ Thomas Gordon, *A political dissertation upon bull-baiting and evening lectures. With occasional meditations on the 30th of January* (London, 1718), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

unusually combative. It was followed by an attempt by Walpole to take a more concessive stance in church matters by forming alliances with powerful whig churchmen including Gibson and Wake.¹⁶ Trenchard and Gordon's pamphlets and essays represented attempts to sway public opinion, especially during the months following the discovery in April 1722 of the plot conceived by Atterbury to restore the Stuart line. They entreated Walpole to punish corrupt malefactors in secular politics by taking a firm line against those involved in the South Sea crisis and in religious politics by reducing priestly power within safe bounds for the Christian commonwealth.

The pamphleteering of Trenchard and Gordon must also be understood within the context of early eighteenth-century metropolitan life. Their primary audience was London society in coffee-houses and clubs. In 1719, Trenchard and Gordon met at the Grecian Coffee House, Devereux Court, where they probably conceived *The independent whig*. Their works represented direct interventions in public debate, seeking to influence opinion and sway parliamentary votes. Their world was the same world of sociability and witty public discourse in which the claims of churchmen as much as politicians were to be put to the test of reason. As with Shaftesbury, Addison, and Steele, sociable politeness was to replace sanctimonious prelacy. In the gentlemanly culture of the metropolis, they developed a vision of true religion in its most natural form as a yardstick against which to measure priestcraft and produce a positive vision for learned and pastoral clergymen in Hanoverian England.

Natural religion and its subversion

Trenchard and Gordon defined true religion as a simple and natural phenomenon. Plainly understood by all, religion in its truest sense did not require sacerdotal priests as each man was his own minister. The third, anonymous, author of *The independent whig* claimed that 'Religion, or the Worship of a Deity, is natural to Man'.¹⁷ Gospel Christianity was the apex of natural religion. In *Cato's letters* Trenchard argued that Jesus Christ 'plainly intended to reduce men to natural religion, which was corrupted and defaced by the numerous superstitions of the Jews, and by the absurd idolatries of the Gentiles'. True Christianity consisted 'only in worshipping one god, and in doing good to men'. It lacked 'priests,

¹⁶ Pocock's observation that Trenchard and Gordon stood 'against the alliance of Whig politicians with the established church' usefully encompasses their fear of whig proximity to high-church and Jacobite elements within the Anglican Church but unfortunately seems to suggest that they did not support the alliance of church and state at all. See 'The varieties of whiggism from exclusion to reform: a history of ideology and discourse', in *Virtue, commerce, and history*, p. 240.

¹⁷ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *The independent whig*, 7th edn, 2 vols. (London, 1743), II, p. 97.

sacrifices, and ceremonies'.¹⁸ Gordon concurred that true Christianity was expressed by the golden rule. The 'moral duties of religion' included 'general peace, and unlimited charity, publick spirit, equity, forbearance, and good deeds to all men'.¹⁹ This morality was simple and easily understood by all.²⁰ Trenchard and Gordon wrote jointly in *The independent whig* that 'The Kingdom of Heaven is said to be revealed to Babes and Sucklings... easily learned and known, by those who make use of their natural Faculties, and uncorrupted Reason'.²¹

The gospel laid out the dictates of natural religion clearly and simply. All that was required by the Old Testament, Gordon asserted, was that the lay believer 'fear God, and keep his Commandments'. The New Testament simply dictated the belief that 'Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh'. Whomsoever could 'prove his Obedience and Faith, by these two plain Duties, fulfils the Law and the Gospel'.²² If passages in scripture were unclear or debatable, 'a new Inspiration will be necessary to reduce them to Certainty'. Until then, he who hoped 'to put a Construction upon such Passages in Scripture, and enjoins us to believe his Interpretation' should not demand 'Submission to the Word of God, but to his own Authority and Imagination'.²³ The gospel laid down the requirements of Christianity. All else were things indifferent and human constructions that could not be mandated.

The equation of natural religion with primitive Christianity was also cast in civic terms. Roman paganism had been a religion of virtuous citizens whose simple piety lay in living well in this world in preparation for rewards in the next life. Religion was to consist 'in doing good Actions', explained Gordon.²⁴ Socrates, Plato, Cato, and Brutus were 'excellent Persons' who followed the 'simple Dictates of human Reason' and did not need 'Creeds and Fathers'.²⁵ Modern Christianity would imitate virtuous paganism by consisting only in 'Living well' as testament that 'we believe well'.²⁶ True religion was conducive to 'publick spirit'. Piety was 'the highest virtue' because it enjoined 'one man's care for many, and the concern of every man for all'.²⁷ Religion was necessary for good government and 'no History or Voyages give us an Account of any Country, in any manner civilized, without Religion, as

¹⁸ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, p. 940.

¹⁹ Ibid., I, p. 463.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 464.

²¹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 57.

²² Ibid., p. 23.

²³ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 226.

²⁷ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, I, p. 251.

well as Priests or Ministers'.²⁸ It was the function of religion 'to propagate every divine truth' and 'to enforce every social and civil duty'.²⁹ It was the genius of Roman religion, Gordon argued, that it inspired love of country, virtue, and honour, rendering the 'public good' and 'the glory of the State' the highest 'end of all'.³⁰

The arguments of Barbeyrac were also brought to bear upon the social and political roles of religion. Barbeyrac had argued that religion, by means of the threat of divine injunction, supported morality by acting upon the passion of fear and by driving human interest.³¹ Trenchard and Gordon agreed that 'Morality is Natural Religion, which prompts us to do Good to all Men, and to all Men alike'. Morality 'is social Virtue, or rather the Mother of all social Virtues', since it 'wishes and promotes unlimited and universal Happiness to the whole World'.³² But humans might not always follow the dictates of morality due to the dominance of their passions. It was 'the Business of the Christian Religion, to recover to human Nature those Virtues, which were either lost or lessened by the Fall of Adam'.³³ As Gordon later wrote, 'the Appetites and Passions of Men being too powerful for Reason, and the Law of Nature', religion had to be instituted to provide 'Sanctions and Restraints' to the virtuous and vicious.³⁴

However, natural religion quickly became corrupted by untrammelled priestliness. Trenchard and Gordon's account of the origins of priestcraft was conducted in religiously neo-Harringtonian terms. Constructing human behaviour and society in terms of interests and passions, Gordon wrote that the clerical class in any society had an 'Interest' in the fabrication of superstition and the putative ability to enforce conformity. Priests had 'usurped this Privilege wholly to themselves' and 'it has wonderfully answered their great Ends of Power and Wealth'.³⁵ Realising that the laity was not always guided by pure reason, priests came to understand that the only way 'of dealing with mankind, is to deal with their passions'. It was a general maxim that the 'first elements, or knowledge of politicks, is the

²⁸ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, II, p. 97.

²⁹ Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *The works of Tacitus*, ed. Thomas Gordon, 2nd edn, 4 vols. (London, 1737), III, p. 226.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³¹ See Jean Barbeyrac, *The spirit of the ecclesiasticks in all sects and ages*, ed. Thomas Gordon (London, 1722), pp. 3-4, 5-8, 13-15.

³² Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, pp. xli-xlii.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 229.

knowledge of the passions'.³⁶ But without reason and understanding to guide the passions, laymen were vulnerable to false religion.

Even the dominance of the secular power in spirituals had failed to quell superstition and priestcraft. Gordon wrote in the second number of *The independent whig* that the clergy, 'like other Militia, were raised and paid for protecting Mankind from their Spiritual Enemy'. Employed by the secular power to encourage pious worship, clerics 'soon made use of the Sword put into their Hands against their Masters, and set up for themselves'. Although 'the whole End of their Institution was to make Men wiser and better', by taking advantage of the natural ignorance of laymen, clerics taught 'blind Obedience' only to their own caste. Superstition was 'an inseparable Creature of their Power' as false doctrines, theologies, and mysteries were fabricated to entrench clerical spiritual tyranny.³⁷

In ancient times, priestcraft had been an innovation of Hebrews and pagans. Glossing Barbeyrac's translation of Samuel Pufendorf's *De jure naturae et gentium* (1672), Trenchard and Gordon lamented in *The independent whig* how 'the Pagan, the Jewish, and too many Christian Priests, have all ever agreed in concealing, disguising, mangling, calumniating, and opposing the eternal Principles of Morality, or Natural Religion'. Through false superstitions, ceremonies, metaphysics, and dominion, priests had created 'a Religion of the Body, or a Religion of the Imagination, or a Religion of Shew, Profit and Terror'.³⁸ Pagan and Jewish priestcraft had provided the basis for Roman Catholic worship. In *Cato's letters*, Trenchard provided an account of the 'the absurdities of the Romish Church' using the exegetical commentaries of the low-church and whiggish dean of Norwich, Humphrey Prideaux.³⁹ Following Prideaux, Trenchard argued that Christian priestcraft 'is copied from the religion of Zoroaster and the Persian Magi' instituted during the reign of Darius I.⁴⁰ Zoroaster had fabricated superstitions based on false divine inspiration and his liturgy was taken up by Moses.⁴¹ Zoroaster's priests were said to be divinely instituted and secured by hereditary membership. They stood independent of civil power, endowed with large revenues in lands. Above all other priests stood the 'Archimagus, or arch-priest, who was the same as the high-priest amongst the Jews, or the Pope now amongst the Romanists'.⁴² Zoroaster had even

³⁶ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, pp. 47-8.

³⁷ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xliii.

³⁹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, p. 939. See Humphrey Prideaux, *The old and new testaments connected in the history of the Jews and neighbouring nations* (1715-17). For Prideaux, see Levitin, *Ancient wisdom*, pp. 110-11.

⁴⁰ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, p. 941.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 942-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 943.

‘borrowed a great part of his new religion from the Jews’ including doctrines such as the immortality of the soul.⁴³ The litany of superstitions derived by Roman Catholics from the Magi included candle-burning and pilgrimage.⁴⁴

Like Shaftesbury, Trenchard and Gordon defined superstition as a natural phenomenon. In his *Natural history of superstition*, Trenchard invoked the psychological arguments of Robert Burton, Méric Casaubon, and Henry More in his proposition that there was a universal and natural propensity to superstition among humans. There was ‘something innate in our Constitution’ that ‘made us easily to be susceptible of wrong Impressions, subject to panic Fears, and prone to Superstition and Error’.⁴⁵ Nature, ‘in many Circumstances, seems to work by a sort of secret Magic, and by ways unaccountable to us’.⁴⁶ If and when humans were ignorant of the operation of nature, their passions overcame their reason and subjected them ‘to mistake the Phantasms and Images of our own Brains’.⁴⁷ Clergymen, when rightly oriented, needed to return laymen to ‘the natural Calm and Serenity of their Minds’ to limit the natural propensity to superstition.⁴⁸

Enthusiasm was also a natural phenomenon.⁴⁹ It was ‘a strong and impetuous Motion, or extraordinary and transcendant Ardor, Fervency or Pregnancy of the Soul, Spirits or Brain, which is vulgarly thought to be supernatural’.⁵⁰ It was also naturally contagious. Making reference to Newtonian science, Trenchard argued that ‘Every thing in Nature is in constant Motion, and perpetually emitting Effluvioms and minute Particles of its Substance, which operate upon, and strike other Bodies’.⁵¹ Enthusiasm was a medical and physiological phenomenon, since ‘the poisonous and melancholy Vapours streaming from an enthusiast, cause Distraction and Raving as well as the Bite of a Mad Dog’.⁵² Miasmatic clouds spread the natural vapours emitting from the enthusiast. Some religious sects, such as the Quakers, had learned how to take advantage of these effluvia by harnessing them for their own benefit in worship. Citing George Keith, who had notoriously denounced the Quakers before joining the Anglican fold, and his pamphlet *The magic of Quakerism; or the chief mysteries of*

⁴³ Ibid., p. 944.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 944-5.

⁴⁵ John Trenchard, ‘The natural history of superstition’ (1709), in John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon *A collection of tracts*, 2 vols. (London, 1751), I, p. 380.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 388.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 381.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 384.

⁴⁹ Matthew Day, ‘The sacred contagion: John Trenchard, natural history, and the effluvial politics of religion’, *History of religions*, 50:2 (2010), 144-61.

⁵⁰ Trenchard, ‘Natural history of superstition’, in Trenchard and Gordon, *Collection of tracts*, I, p. 400.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 385.

⁵² Ibid., p. 390.

Quakerism laid open (1707), Trenchard claimed that some Quakers ‘have arrived to a great Proficiency in this natural Magnetism, or Magic, having by a watchful and accurate Observation of these mutual Effluxes and Emanations’.⁵³

This analysis of superstition and enthusiasm was composed by children of the Restoration and Revolution. Trenchard and Gordon, living in the aftermath of the wars of religion, agonised over the political consequences of false religion. The enthusiast ‘longs to feast and riot upon human Sacrifices, turn Cities and Nations into Shambles, and destroy with Fire and Sword such who dare thwart his Frenzy’. True religion, however, ‘improves the Faculties, exhilarates the Spirits, makes the Mind calm and serene, renders us useful to Society, and most active in the Affairs of the World’.⁵⁴ Religious zeal was also a product of superstitious priestcraft. Trenchard warned against ‘the Impostures of pretended Prophets, the Frauds of Priests, and the Dreams and Visions of Enthusiasts for heavenly Revelations, and our own Infirmities and panic Fears for divine Impulses’.⁵⁵ Enthusiastic preachers, those ‘Pulpit Fire-Brands’, ‘Incendiaries’, and ‘Pulpit-Blazers’, targeted the ‘Ignorant’ multitude in hope that it would be ‘blown up into those Flames’.⁵⁶ Trenchard and Gordon both wrote in *The independent whig* that ‘there are such Seeds of Superstition in human Nature, that all our Prudence and Caution will be little enough to prevent even Adoration to their Persons’.⁵⁷ Religion in its true and false forms was a natural phenomenon. But there was every reason to believe the false religions of superstition and enthusiasm were rife in Augustan England.

Anglican priestcraft

Priestcraft and superstition were as much problems among Protestants as in the ancient world and the Roman Catholic Church. Praising Tillotson’s fight against Anglican priestcraft, Trenchard and Gordon in *The independent whig* complained that the laity were still deliberately involved in irrelevant ‘Disputes about Religion with most Sets of Ecclesiastics’.⁵⁸ Scholastic metaphysics continued to disrupt the perfect morality of the gospel whereas true Christianity was ‘most easy and intelligible in itself, and adapted to the meanest Capacities’. False Christianity was ‘a Metaphysical Science, made up of useless Subtleties, and insignificant Distinctions’.⁵⁹ Patristics were also a problem. True religion was

⁵³ Ibid., p. 391.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 403, 384.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 380.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *Political dissertation*, pp. 12-17.

⁵⁷ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

felt inwardly and did not rely on ‘Councils and Fathers’.⁶⁰ Barbeyrac had shown ‘the Absurdities and Ravings of those Reverend old Gentlemen, whom we call the Fathers’.⁶¹

Patristics had been the enemy of the right relationship between church and state. Relying on Prideaux, Gordon cited the example of Saint Jerome who ‘derives Episcopal Power from the Instigation of the Devil, which is also an impudent Reflection upon our Orthodox Church’. Saint Basil, who had been involved in constructing the Nicene creed, arrogantly ‘challenged the Emperor, his Liege Lord, to fight him’. Saint Ambrose ‘bullied Theodosius, the Lord’s Anointed’ and ‘refused to admit his Imperial Majesty to partake of the Lord’s Body, till he had made his humble Submission’.⁶² The dispute between Ambrose and Theodosius had been the basis of a classic debate in Reformation Europe due to Ambrose’s excommunication of the emperor. All these examples show that Trenchard and Gordon believed Constantine and his successors were not paragons of godly kingship but quislings of Nicene episcopal power.

Superstitious priests in Protestant England were the modern imitators of these early corrupters. Trenchard and Gordon believed the problem of Anglican priestcraft had swelled under Stuart rule. A feature of Stuart priestcraft had been the compact struck between the clerical order and civil tyrants. In *Cato’s letters* Trenchard addressed the laity and asked it to consider ‘all the reigns since Queen Elizabeth’s time to the Revolution’ as reigns that ‘oppressed you, and that Revolution that saved you’. The compact between Stuart tyrants and clergymen forced laymen ‘to give up your persons, your consciences, and your fortunes, to the pleasure and lust of the prince’.⁶³ By this compact, priests were guilty of *praemunire*. In 1610, priests persuaded James I to appoint three bishops to re-ordain the Scottish presbytery who in turn consecrated ten further bishops in Scotland.⁶⁴ Trenchard recounted the advance of ‘popish principles’ in the Church of England under James I and Charles I, including seizing power of the keys to heaven and preaching doctrines like indelible clerical character, uninterrupted succession, and divine right of kings and bishops.⁶⁵ Under Charles II, priests never preached ‘against the terrible excesses, the arbitrary imprisonments, the legal murders, and violation of property’.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 242.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. xliii.

⁶² Ibid., p. 244.

⁶³ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato’s letters*, II, p. 882.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 883.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 884.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 887.

The reign of James II provided Trenchard and Gordon with the ideal opportunity to mock the internal inconsistencies of Anglican loyalty to *jure divino* monarchy. They accused churchmen of supporting James II by consecrating ‘all his usurpations, his armies, and dispensing power’ before turning against him when he provided royal indulgence to Protestant Dissent. Churchmen hypocritically supported the whig opposition by endorsing the resistance theory that they had for so long harangued in the pulpit. It was ironic that ‘upon their principles [the clergy] were rebels’ but ‘have been damning you and the nation for that resistance ever since’. Wavering clerical loyalty demonstrated the reality of Anglican priestcraft, concluded Trenchard: if ‘a popish tyrant plunders and oppresses you, you neither can nor ought to have any remedy’, but ‘if he touch but a tithe-pig or surplice of theirs, their heel is ready to be lifted up against him’.⁶⁷

Trenchard and Gordon attacked two further elements of Anglican priestcraft. One was the unreformed universities and another was the charity-school movement. As Trenchard wrote in *Cato’s letters*, the principles of the country’s nobility and gentry were ‘debauched in our universities’ at the same time as ‘those of our common people in our charity-schools, who are taught, as soon as they can speak, to blabber out *High Church* and *Ormond*’.⁶⁸ In *The character of an independent whig* (1720), Gordon complained of ‘a Popish, Impious and Rebellious Spirit’ that ‘reigns at Oxford’ where ‘Disaffection is promoted’ and ‘open and black Perjury is justified’.⁶⁹ The magisterial Reformation had afforded means of reform but the ‘Universities seem to dread no such Things as a Visitation’, since ‘the Corruption of our Seminaries’ leads to the spread of ‘their disaffected Spawn in too many Parishes.’⁷⁰

Charity schools were a feature of the wider reformation of manners movement that had begun life during the 1690s. The charity-school movement had been launched by Archbishop Tenison to provide shelter, apprenticeships, and Anglican education to needy boys. But they had fallen victim to party dispute. Whigs like Mandeville feared that charity schools had become the seedbed of high-church and tory disaffection.⁷¹ Trenchard and Gordon noted that the schools themselves had been founded by ‘pious men, many of them dissenters’, in opposition to tory high-flying accusations that the reformation of manners

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 888.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 920. The reference is to James Butler, second duke of Ormond, who joined Bolingbroke in exile and supported the Jacobite rising.

⁶⁹ Thomas Gordon, ‘The character of an independent whig’, in Trenchard and Gordon, in *Collection of tracts*, I, p. 317.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 319.

⁷¹ Bernard Mandeville, ‘An essay on charity, and charity-schools’ in *The fable of the bees: or private vices, publick benefits*, 2 vols. (London, 1732), I, pp. 284, 309, 310. See M. G. Jones, *The charity school movement* (London, 1964), pp. 112-14.

movement was undermining the traditional disciplinary apparatus of the Church of England.⁷² However, high-churchmen quickly realised the value of the schools in training loyal adherents. The schools now ‘decoy superstitious and factious men out of their shops and their business, and old doting women out of their infirmaries, to hear too often seditious harangues upon the power of the clergy’. Lectures and instructions had become ‘inconsistent with our present establishment of church and state’.⁷³

Nevertheless, whigs and low-churchmen were not totally innocent. They had ignored early calls from the likes of Tenison and Burnet to concern themselves with the inculcation of sound principles in education. In *Cato’s letters*, Trenchard complained that one reason Toryism, Jacobitism, and high-churchmanship continued to enjoy popular support was that, following the Glorious Revolution, nothing ‘was ever done to rectify or regulate the education of youth, the source of all our other evils’. Schools of literature ‘were suffered to continue under the direction of the enemies to all sound literature and publick virtue’. Opposed to liberty, high-churchmen sent ‘glowing hot from the universities’ a new generation to preach against the Revolution.⁷⁴ As Trenchard later commented in opposition to charity schools, a ‘free government must subsist upon the affections of the people’ but ‘if those affections be perpetually debauched’ and ‘if the education of youth be altogether inconsistent with the nature of it’, free government would inevitably fall to tyranny.⁷⁵ Clerical supporters of the whig order had become complacent. An energetic defence of the church-state relationship was necessary.

The national establishment

True principles in church and state were threatened by tory high-churchmen and neglected by whig low-churchmen. However, Trenchard and Gordon hoped to provide a full defence of Revolution principles in church and state. They did so by combining Protestant ecclesiology with religious neo-Harringtonianism. Beginning with a standard neo-Harringtonian claim, Trenchard wrote in *Cato’s letters* that ‘it is most certain, that the first principle of all power is property; and every man will have his share of it in proportion as he enjoys property’.⁷⁶ The ‘balance of property’ determined the balance of political power and ‘the great secret in politicks is, nicely to watch and observe this fluctuation and change of natural power, and to

⁷² Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato’s letters*, II, p. 918.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 919-20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 145.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 921.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 607.

adjust the political to it'.⁷⁷ Trenchard rehearsed the two great processes identified by Harrington which altered property and politics in England. First, Henry VII strengthened the economic and political position of the commonality to undermine the position of the Yorkist nobility.⁷⁸ Second, Henry VIII 'by seizing the revenues of the ecclesiasticks... and dispersing those estates amongst the people, made that balance much heavier'.⁷⁹ The balance of politics was now weighted against the spiritual power.

One of two great causes of the fundamental alteration in modern English economic and political power, Trenchard believed that the declining independence of the church had determined the course of seventeenth-century politics. The growth of trade during the Elizabethan period had empowered the previously feudalised commons through new commercial wealth. Earlier, church lands had also been released following the 1530s. Royal policy came to rely on the doctrinal content of preaching rather than the political power of the church. James I, lacking Elizabeth's political moderation and harbouring absolutist dreams, took 'the assistance of the governing clergy (who hoped by his means to recover what they lost by the Reformation) to regain a power, by pulpit-haranguing and distinctions'. This campaign to regain absolutist power made James's reign 'a perpetual struggle between himself and his Parliaments' and 'by such conduct he sowed the seeds of that fatal and bloody Civil War'. The civil wars left Charles II with 'all the exterior advantages requisite to enslave a people' including a nation weary of the 'sound of liberty', a nobility alienated by sequestrations, and a clergy 'provoked by the loss of their dignities and revenues'.⁸⁰

But there was more than religious neo-Harringtonianism at play in Trenchard and Gordon's analysis of the Revolutionary church-state relationship. There was also the Erastianism of the superiority of the temporal power over spirituals. In a message intended explicitly for the lower house of convocation after it had censured Hoadly, Trenchard and Gordon reminded clerics that 'the Gospel has not given you one Foot of Land, or one Shilling of Money'. Instead, 'Your Church is a Creature of the Constitution, you are Creatures of the Law'. Further, 'you must evidently belye Divine Right, if you pretend to derive from thence, what all the World sees you owe to secular Bounty'.⁸¹ Gordon praised Erastus for dismissing 'all these Squabbles of the Clergy about their own Power' and showing 'that none of them had any Right to what they almost all claimed'. Erastus demonstrated 'from Reason and

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 608, 610.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 610-11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 611.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, pp. xxv-xxvi.

Scripture, that every State had the same Authority of modelling their Ecclesiastical as Civil Government'.⁸² This generalised Erastianism represented a gloss on Erastus's position, since he had simply opposed excessive use of the power of excommunication against sixteenth-century Heidelberg.

Tory and high-church attempts to revive sacerdotal priestliness threatened the Reformation itself. The 'whole Reformation was built' upon the principle that 'Protestant States modelled their Ecclesiastical Polity according to their own Inclinations or Interests'. It was 'the last Degree of Priestly Insolence for a Body of Men to call themselves the only true Churchmen'. It was ironic, Gordon mocked, that high-churchmen should resist the fundamental principles of the Reformation 'at the same time that they deny, and every-where exclaim against, the fundamental and essential Article which distinguishes it from most other Churches, and particularly from Presbytery'. In a rhetorical gesture that equated tory high-churchmanship with Presbyterians for their pretensions to *jure divino* authority, Gordon claimed that 'the Calvinists are more Orthodox than the Churchmen themselves'.⁸³ Invoking the name of Thomas Cranmer, Trenchard and Gordon argued that ordination should be 'no more than a Civil Appointment to an Ecclesiastical Office'. The 'Apostles had no Ambition, Jurisdiction, Dignities, or Revenues, to which they could be Successors'. Paraphrasing Hoadly's sermon in 1717, Trenchard and Gordon reminded churchmen that 'our Saviour himself declares, that *his Kingdom is not of this World*'.⁸⁴ Unlike modern divines, the apostles were 'inspired, had the Gift of working Miracles, could bestow the Holy Ghost, had the Discernment of Spirits'. They were 'proper Judges of the Fitness of Men for the Ministry, and could confer that Fitness'.⁸⁵ There was no scriptural evidence that these privileges had been passed down.

Within these generally Erastian themes operated English magisterial notes. Trenchard dedicated a paper of *The independent whig* to the subject: 'The church proved a creature of the civil power, by acts of parliament, and the oaths of the clergy'.⁸⁶ He praised a 'bold and honest Physician (whose Name was Erastus)' who argued 'that the Gospel gave no Pre-eminence or Authority to Christians over one another'. Erastus showed that 'it was only a Matter of Prudence and Convenience to appoint particular Persons to officiate for the rest,

⁸² Ibid., p. 100.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

with proper Rewards and Encouragements'.⁸⁷ At the time of the Henrician Reformation, the clergy 'threw themselves upon the King's Mercy, acknowledging his Supremacy in the fullest and most significant Words'.⁸⁸ Trenchard recited the litany of parliamentary acts, royal constitutions, canons, and ordinances that had been enacted. These included royal power to call convocation, appointment of the episcopate, and restriction of *praemunire*.⁸⁹ Edwardian ecclesiastical reforms, such as the enactment of the Book of Common Prayer, were listed, before those of the Elizabethan era, including, most importantly, the oath of supremacy.⁹⁰

A loud note was struck for the godly prince. Trenchard and Gordon offered a yardstick against which to measure supreme governors of the Church of England. In *Cato's letters*, Trenchard praised Elizabeth I 'who was resolved to be truly what she was called, Head of the Church' and 'kept her priests in a just and becoming subordination, and would not suffer them to meddle with or prate about her government'.⁹¹ Stuart kingship fell predictably short. Trenchard described James I as 'a weak prince' under whom 'many of the leading clergy advanced all the vilest tenets of popery'.⁹² Charles I, 'a bigot by nature as well as education', given that he had once prepared to enter the priesthood, conspired in Laudian popery. Trenchard dwelled upon the appointment of Richard Montagu to the bishopric of Chichester, despite being accused of popery by parliament, and Laud's hounding of John Bastwick for publishing two treatises attacking the Roman Catholic ceremonial.⁹³ Charles II was a crypto-papist who pursued 'the barefaced encouragement of popery, and the persecution of Protestants'. Cultivating a sense of an international Protestant brotherhood, Trenchard attacked Charles' dealings with Louis XIV as an attempt to 'destroy the only state in the world that could be then called the bulwark of liberty and the Protestant religion' through 'unjust wars with the United Provinces'.⁹⁴

The Revolution represented a reassertion of the magisterial principle of the crown-in-parliament. William III and his successors left Englishmen 'protected and secure in standing laws' with 'full enjoyment of your consciences'.⁹⁵ By granting liberty of conscience to Protestant Dissenters, William demonstrated to the clergy that 'he would not be a blind tool

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 100-1.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 102-4.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-7.

⁹¹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, p. 883.

⁹² Ibid., p. 884.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 885.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 887.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

to a priestly faction, but would equally protect all his subjects who were faithful to him'.⁹⁶ But Revolution principles in religion were not secure. Queen Anne had fallen 'into the hands of a few desperate traitors' who 'put France into a condition again to enslave Europe' and aimed 'to place a popish traitor, an attainted fugitive, upon the throne of these kingdom'.⁹⁷ It was not difficult to decipher the identity of these desperate traitors: Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, and Bolingbroke.

There is further evidence of Trenchard and Gordon's whiggish insistence on the magisterial authority of the crown-in-parliament. Trenchard claimed in *Cato's letters* that churchmen hoped 'that some favourable opportunities might happen to get away the regale [prerogatives of royalty] from the crown'. But 'we never had a prince whom they could entirely govern, or who would not be governed at all by them, but they have laid claim to it, and attempted it'. What really made the difference, 'what stood always in their way, and made all their designs impracticable, was the power of Parliament, and the liberties of the people, who preserved the prerogative of the crown to preserve themselves'. Thus churchmen 'laboured to make the prince absolute' because it was 'easier to flatter, mislead, or bargain with one man (and often a weak one) than to deceive a whole people, and make them conspire against themselves'.⁹⁸ It is too often supposed that clashes between absolute and limited monarchy in early modern thought were based on secular terms. Trenchard's languages of Christian Reform demonstrate that religious concerns stood at the crux of early modern arguments against royal absolutism.

The equation of godly kingship with the crown-in-parliament was related to whig resistance theory. As Gordon wrote in *Cato's letters*, 'To obey a prince, who does himself obey the laws, is confessed on all hands to be loyalty'. But it was only 'ungodly pedants' who believed that loyalty 'also consists in the very contrary, and in obeying a wicked prince' who 'though he be an enemy to God, is the vicegerent of God'.⁹⁹ Since the magisterial Reformation had been enacted by the king-in-parliament, a monarch opting to act without or against the will of parliament transgressed the principles of godly English monarchy. As Trenchard argued in *Cato's letters*, the 'constitution of our Church is excellently well adapted to our civil government', since bishops were held to account by the House of Lords and the inferior clergy by the House of Commons. Crucially, 'all are subject to the legislative power

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 888.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 889.

⁹⁸ Ibid., II, p. 900.

⁹⁹ Ibid., I, p. 255.

mediately, and immediately to the crown' which retained the power to appoint chief ecclesiastical officers.¹⁰⁰ The Glorious Revolution also meant that the monarch, 'by act of Parliament, as well as interest and education, will be of the established Church'.¹⁰¹

It is, therefore, important to distinguish the civil religion of Trenchard and Gordon from that of Hobbes. As Rose has shown, Hobbesian Erastianism sought to make the sovereign a priestly sacerdotal king, contravening the standard Erastian defence of royal supremacy on jurisdictional and legal grounds.¹⁰² The defence of a tolerant national establishment set the authors of *The independent whig* against Hobbes's proposals that 'the Civil Magistrate of every Country is the Legislator in Matters of Religion'; that 'his Subjects ought to obey him therein'; and that 'if they do not, they should be compelled by Force to profess that Religion which he enjoins'. Such a position destroyed 'God's Dominion, by subverting his Authority and Laws, and by making a God of the Magistrate'. It rooted 'out all Religion, by taking away Mens Right to follow their Consciences therein' which 'constitutes the very Essence of Religion'.¹⁰³

The role of clergymen

In Trenchard and Gordon's national establishment, clergymen were to be more than the mere officers of a prudential sovereign to keep the laity obeisant. The role of Christian ministers stretched deep into the history of Christian Reform. Above all, clergymen were to be pastoral. The clerical 'Office is evidently adapted to promote the Welfare of Human Nature, to propagate its Peace and Prosperity in this World, as well as its eternal Felicity in the next'. As such, 'it is the Interest of all Men to honour it; and none but a Madman will condemn and ridicule what has a manifest Tendency to the Security and Happiness of all Mankind'.¹⁰⁴ Clergymen 'have the Possession and Direction of our Fears'. They 'are admitted in Health and Sickness' and 'Every Sunday they have the sole Opportunity of gaining our Esteem by worthy and useful Instructions, and all the Week by their good Lives'. They had the power to 'educate us whilst young, influence us in our middle Age, govern us in our Dotage, and we neither live nor die without them'. Such a body of men, 'so constituted and endowed, so privileged and posted, are capable of being most useful and beneficent to Society, if their

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., II, p. 588.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 591.

¹⁰² Rose, *Godly kingship*, p. 204.

¹⁰³ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, II, pp. 112-13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., I, p. 18.

Actions be suitable to their Professions'.¹⁰⁵ Gordon wrote in his commentary within *The works of Tacitus* that 'a parochial Clergy are of infinite use, where they take pains by their example and instructions to mend the hearts of the people, where they teach them to love God, and their Neighbour, and Virtue, and their Country, and to hate no man'.¹⁰⁶ Champion has argued that this passage presents republican recognition of the 'useful propagandistic role of the clergy' in harnessing piety for the political order.¹⁰⁷ By this reading, Gordon connects English republicanism with anti-Christian freethinking which perceived Anglicanism as inherently priest-ridden.¹⁰⁸ However, it would be more fruitful to understand the passage as a defence of Christian primitivism in the context of England's long Reformation.

Nevertheless, the language of Christian Reform was determined by civic thought. For instance, Trenchard and Gordon connected true religion with political economy. Priests, free from secular control, were slaves of passion, economically unproductive, and incapable of providing a virtuous example of Christian citizenship. Gordon satirised 'A Clergyman, who is drunk on Saturday, will but, with an ill Grace, talk of his Dignity and Ambassadorship on Sunday'.¹⁰⁹ Honouring priests by economic means impoverished the laity because 'the people dare not work to support their families, but must contribute, out of the little which remains, to pay their oppressors for preaching them out of their wits'.¹¹⁰ Invoking the theme of the Protestant grand tour, Gordon cited Burnet who 'tells us, in his Letters of Travels, that the Priests of Italy have found out a Secret to make Men miserable' through the supposedly godly practice of fasting.¹¹¹ However, prudent living in this world served the public good. More generally, true religion cultivated good citizens. Clergymen were 'absolutely necessary to the Peace and Happiness of Society' in the same way as ancient Roman consuls who 'had an Officer attending their Triumphal Chariots'.¹¹² It was the genius of the early Roman republic to institute public priests to inculcate 'the raising and recommending of Public Spirit, so necessary to the prosperity of every Country, and even to the preservation of all'.¹¹³

Trenchard and Gordon's clergy would also be pedagogical. Gordon proposed in his edition of Tacitus that the clergy were to act as 'public teachers'. He argued that it 'becomes the wisdom of all Governors so to fashion and regulate the public Teachers' and to remind

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Tacitus, *Works*, III, p. 221.

¹⁰⁷ Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*, p. 7, n. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 15, 20, 24, 224, 234-5.

¹⁰⁹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, p. 799.

¹¹¹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 232.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹³ Tacitus, *Works*, III, p. 245.

these teachers that they were ‘the Creatures of the State, appointed by the civil Power to a religious office’. This was ‘the wisdom of England at the Reformation’ as clergymen were obliged to swear loyalty to the crown and to deny any independent power from the secular arm.¹¹⁴ The apostles were the highest example of public teaching. Even though they enjoyed ‘no power, no revenues, nor even the countenance of authority’, their ‘reverence and success flowed from their heavenly doctrine and behaviour’. Clergymen ought to imitate the apostles and make it their business to urge the gospel ‘upon the consciences of men, to improve them in practical holiness, to purify their lives in this world, and thence fit them for another.’¹¹⁵

In *The independent whig* Gordon laid out the pedagogical responsibilities of the clergy. The multitude could misunderstand elements of scripture, which, though ‘given us from Heaven to be Light unto our Feet’, was ‘dark and insufficient without human Aid and Explication’.¹¹⁶ It was ‘absurd’ that clergymen should involve the flock in rarefied metaphysical debates when the key precepts of Christianity were so clear. Recalling the famous passage of Locke in *The reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), Gordon argued that nobody should ‘send Cookmaids and Day-labourers to study Aristotle and Suarez’ or ‘to rake into the Jargon of the Schools’.¹¹⁷ Clergymen must ‘press the Reading of the Scripture upon their Hearers’ and ‘inculcate the plain Precepts of Faith and Morality contained in it’. They must ‘demonstrate the Goodness of God to Men by proving, that he has laid down to us in plain Words, every Duty which he requires of us, either to himself, our Neighbour, or ourselves’. They must finally execute those duties of the Christian religion dictated by the word of God as ‘necessary to be performed by single Persons in the several Churches or Societies of Christians’.¹¹⁸ Those duties included reading scripture, public prayers read to the congregation, and administering the sacraments.

Toleration and enthusiasm

It was a further crucial aspect of the pastoral and pedagogical clergy that it rendered the national establishment tolerant. Trenchard and Gordon sought to relate political with religious liberty by arguing that political liberty could only exist where there also existed liberty of conscience. Civil tyranny was almost invariably supported by false religion, since true religion encouraged spiritual exploration. Neither ‘the Christian religion, nor natural religion,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 224.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 226-7.

¹¹⁶ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, I, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 28-9.

nor any thing else that ought to be called religion, can subsist under tyrannical governments', for 'such governments are fertile in superstition, in wild whimsies, delusive phantoms, and ridiculous dreams' all designed 'to terrify the human soul, degrade its dignity, deface its beauty, and fetter it with slavish and unmanly ears'. In tones echoing Shaftesbury, religion under civil tyranny was the 'proper object of fraud, grimace, and imposition' governed by 'gloomy impostors'.¹¹⁹ In *Cato's letters*, Gordon commented on the worst excesses of Stuart tyranny, arguing that there could never be 'a more provoking, impudent, shocking, and blasphemous position, than to assert all this group of horrors, or the author of them, to be of God's appointment', for 'God must be belied, his creatures must be fettered, frightened, deceived, and starved'.¹²⁰ Everything 'dear and desirable to society must result from a state of liberty', including not only 'property and life' but 'conscience and the faculties of the soul'. Religion 'in order to do good, must be left entirely free', lest it become the tool of usurping priests and civil tyrants. False religion was the otherworldly metaphysics of superstitious impostors who seek to 'preach up self-denial, to preach against the world, and to claim successorship to the poor, wandering, holy and disinterested Apostles'.¹²¹

A tolerant national establishment was necessary to provide a moderate corrective to enthusiasm. Toleration for Protestant Dissent should not be confused with approval. Gordon believed Calvinism was equally as dangerous as Roman Catholicism or Islam in its enforcement of intolerant orthodoxy, since 'Affliction and misery, oppression and imposture, are as bad in Christendom as in Turkey, in Holland as in Rome'. 'Protestant rulers' had no more rights to persecute 'than the Sultan to oppress Protestants'.¹²² When repressed by the ecclesiastical and civil powers, Protestant sectarianism became enthusiasm. Trenchard repeated the themes of his *Natural history* in *Cato's letters* by arguing that enthusiasm was a natural and contagious phenomenon that needed to be salved. Discussing such examples as the sixteenth-century Spanish Hermits, the Alumbrados, the Illuminati, the seventeenth-century Italian Quietists, and the Camisards in London, Trenchard wrote of the best means to treat such enthusiastic believers.¹²³ A moderate option of public worship would show these men that they are not 'princes, prophets, or messengers from heaven' and would provide a corrective for mechanic preachers.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, I, p. 462.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 439-40.

¹²¹ Tacitus, *Works*, III, p. 6.

¹²² Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, II, pp. 907-8.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 856.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 859.

As part of their defence of tolerant Anglicanism, Trenchard and Gordon deliberately tried to demonstrate that Protestant Dissent posed no threat to the Church of England. In *Cato's letters*, Trenchard explained his puzzlement that 'some men of good understanding and unquestionable integrity apprehend the danger to the legal constitution of the Church'. The Independents, Anabaptists, and Quakers, the latter lacking a clergy altogether, were each opposed to ecclesiastical establishments and refused to vie for such power. They desired 'nothing but liberty of conscience, and do not envy other preferments which they cannot enjoy themselves'.¹²⁵ Presbyterians had historically not cared to have been described as Dissenters because their expulsion from the Church of England during the early 1660s had been forcible and they continued to defend the idea of a national church. Still, Trenchard dealt with them as the perpetual targets of tory and high-church ire. He conceded that the 'Presbyterians are candidates for church-dominion; and without doubt their priests have hawks' eyes at the church preferments'. But he believed their small number and recent schism into Subscribers and Nonsubscribers rendered them too weak to challenge the Anglican establishment.¹²⁶

Trenchard and Gordon invoked models of Restoration and post-Revolutionary divinity to defend their anti-enthusiastic pastoralia. *The independent whig* remonstrated with high-churchmen for 'constantly charging others with Atheism' who simply sought to allow inward liberty of conscience. Among the victims of such clerical attacks were 'the most learned, best, and most religious Men, as Cudworth, Tillotson, and Locke'.¹²⁷ The paper also made use of 'Mr. Chillingworth' and his *Rule of faith*, set in opposition to the arguments of John Bramhall, bishop of Armagh, in defending *sola scriptura* Christianity.¹²⁸ Gordon argued that Locke, 'One of the greatest Men of the last Age', had shown the need to reform the universities for the prevention of orthodox Anglican priestcraft.¹²⁹ With Locke, Trenchard argued in *Cato's letters* that 'Every man's religion is his own; nor can the religion of any man, of what nature or figure soever, be the religion of another man, unless he also chooses it; which action utterly excludes all force, power, or government.' Religion was a 'relation between God and our own souls only, and consists in a disposition of mind to obey the will of

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. In 1717 the Irish Presbyterian divine John Abernathy refused to minister to a congregation in Dublin to which he had been assigned. His refusal was taken as ecclesiastical high treason, challenging the sacerdotal authority of the ecclesiastical courts. The Presbyterians divided into those Nonsubscribers who supported Abernathy and those Subscribers who sided with the Presbyterian synod. In 1726, he and his supporters were ejected from the Irish Presbyterian church.

¹²⁷ Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, II, p. 140.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

our great Creator, in the manner which we think most acceptable to him'. Civil authority played no legitimate role in this relation but, by ensuring the dominance of the secular arm, it protected the relation. Erastianism was thus married with toleration.¹³⁰

Another key figure was Hoadly. In his pamphlet *Considerations offered upon the approaching peace, and upon the importance of Gibraltar to the British Empire, being the second part of the independent whig* (1720), Gordon situated his intervention at the centre of the Bangorian controversy. Declaring his opposition to 'High Flying Tenets', which led to 'the severest Misery, even brutish Ignorance, abject Slavery, Poverty and Wickedness', Gordon equated 'an Army of aspiring Ecclesiasticks' with the opponents of the Reformation who believed 'Dominion is the Word, Servitude the Duty, and Damnation the Penalty'. In defence of 'Reason and the Gospel' Gordon aligned himself with 'the Bishop of Bangor, a Champion for Truth'.¹³¹ In *The independent whig*, Gordon continued that it was 'as impious as unjust to deny an unlimited Toleration to all Dissenters whatsoever, who own the Laws, and our civil Form of Government'. In explicitly Bangorian terms, Gordon claimed that Dissenters were legitimate in justifying their religious opinions 'by Sincerity'. In any event, 'even where that is wanting, God alone is able to judge, and alone has a Right to punish'.¹³² That these works were composed as an explicit defence of the Bangorian position suggests that it risks prolepsis to read into Hoadly's position the seeds of disestablishmentarianism.¹³³

Trenchard and Gordon have often been characterised as deists because of the intense anticlericalism of their pamphlets, especially during the Bangorian controversy.¹³⁴ But to focus on their inward faith is to misunderstand those motivations that shaped their writings on the public role of religion. Irrespective of their views of the normative truths of Christianity, they believed it could be rendered a civil religion by equating gospel primitivism with natural religion. True religion was simple, clear, and easily understood by all lay believers. It was based simply in the outward exercise of the golden rule. The soteriological relationship between the lay Protestant believer and God was both exclusive and based solely on the personal characteristic of sincerity. Trenchard and Gordon relied on the legal and

¹³⁰ Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's letters*, I, p. 414.

¹³¹ Thomas Gordon, 'Considerations offered upon the approaching peace, and upon the importance of Gibraltar to the British Empire, being the second part of the independant whig' (1720), in Trenchard and Gordon, *Collection of tracts*, I, pp. 270-1.

¹³² Trenchard and Gordon, *Independent whig*, II, pp. 88-9.

¹³³ Starkie, *Church of England*, pp. 3, 17, 189-90.

¹³⁴ McMahon, *Radical whigs*, p. 159; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 151-2; Schwartz, *Knaves, fools, madmen and that subtle effluvium*, p. 53; Heyd, 'Be sober and reasonable', p. 210, n. 58; Berman, 'Anthony Collins's essays', p. 464; Peter Harrison, 'Religion' and the religions, p. 125; Stark, 'Atheism, faith, and the social scientific study of religion', p. 49.

ecclesiastical framework of the magisterial Reformation. More broadly, their Erastianism allowed them to develop a positive defence for pastoral clergymen in Hanoverian England and they drew from whig and low-church modes of divinity to defend their arguments. Their Christian Reform was also expressed in civic voice as they cast Christianity as the modern version of the Roman pagan achievement of rendering religion worldly. Trenchard and Gordon hoped to serve the ends of virtuous, prosperous, and civilised living in this world by turning the priest into the patriot. Christian ministers were to inculcate right religion and, in so doing, they formed good citizens for this world in anticipation of the next.

Chapter 4

Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke

The opposition to Walpole

Bolingbroke defies easy classification. A would-be leader of the tory high-flyers, he served in Queen Anne's tory ministries from 1702 until her death in 1714 before supporting the failed Jacobite succession in 1715.¹ He joined the Old Pretender and served as his secretary of state in 1715-16. He returned to England in 1723 from exile in Paris thanks to a qualified pardon from parliament which left him excluded from the House of Lords. The pen being forced upon him, Bolingbroke spent the 1720s and 1730s attempting to unite a disparate collection of whig and tory opponents to the ministries of Walpole on a 'country' platform through the political journal *The craftsman*.² During the 1730s, Bolingbroke became associated with the 'patriot' opposition to Walpole and the alternative court surrounding Frederick, Prince of Wales.³ Bolingbroke's campaign synthesised in civic and ancient-constitutional voice whig and tory political languages. He wrote of England's mixed and balanced constitution, government in the interest of the common good, and the ancient balance between monarchy and parliament. Such themes comprised the 'spirit of liberty' that was 'authorized by the voice of the country'.⁴

Despite Bolingbroke's kaleidoscopic political identities, his religious writings were those of a theorist of civil religion. He sought to defend the Erastian supremacy of the crown-in-parliament over Church of England from the encroachment of powerful bishops such as Gibson and the clericalist defences of the Church of England of Warburton. Bolingbroke displayed outward conformity to the Articles of Faith as the civil faith of old whiggism. The Church of England was an institution of the civil state, subject to its governance. Bolingbroke always supported the ecclesiastical settlement of the Revolution and insisted upon the Anglican character of the church-state relationship. He was adamant that the monarch must profess the same Anglican religion as the nation and he defended the royal supremacy of the crown-in-parliament. In his posthumous philosophical publications, he conceived of natural religion in which rational individuals exercised understanding of the supreme being through empirical observation of nature and equated it with primitive Christianity. He attacked

¹ Henry St John was elevated to the House of Lords as Viscount Bolingbroke in July 1712. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will refer to him as Bolingbroke throughout.

² The pardon from George I and parliament barred Bolingbroke from returning to the House of Lords.

³ Christine Gerrard, *The patriot opposition to Walpole* (Oxford, 1994).

⁴ Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, ed. David Armitage (Cambridge, 1997), p. 37.

priestcraft, by which priestly power relied on the economic and spiritual exploitation of a superstitious laity, and feared enthusiasm. An Erastian writing in the Reformed Christian tradition, Bolingbroke relied on the godly prince as a bulwark against priestly usurpation and sanctified the state as the sole guarantor of true religion. He also conceived of a positive public role for clergymen in the vanguard against superstition and enthusiasm. Although he believed the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England did not equate with the precepts of gospel Christianity, he hoped that the national church would be further purged of superstition in time. He outwardly observed its articles of faith because he believed reverence for the public faith sanctified belonging within the Christian commonwealth of Hanoverian England.

Although Bolingbroke's religious thought has not been studied seriously for over half a century, he has occasionally been associated with civil religion.⁵ However, this association has been too strongly motivated by fascination with Bolingbroke's deism. He is supposed to have propounded a Machiavellian conception of the political utility of religion due to his antipathy for historical Christianity.⁶ Neglected has been Bolingbroke's debt to the legal and ecclesiastical scholarship of the long Reformation and his insistence that the Church of England could profess natural religion using Christian primitive principles. He judged a church establishment beneficial for the social and political order but he also believed it was vital for the spiritual flourishing of individual lay Protestants. Whatever the precise nature of Bolingbroke's own views on religion, he maintained a principled commitment to the idea of a Christian civil religion.

Obvious objections to this line of argument relate to Bolingbroke's political career itself. Although that which follows may appear digressive, it repays first dispensing with these problems. In 1702-3, Bolingbroke sponsored the Occasional Conformity Bill to prohibit the eponymous practice and, in 1714, he introduced the Schism Bill to undermine Dissenting education and academies. He was manoeuvring to court high-churchmen in his campaign for the tory leadership. The *de facto* tory leader, Harley, who became Queen Anne's first lord of the treasury between 1710 and 1714, had attended a Dissenting academy and was suspected to be sympathetic to Nonconformists.⁷ Speaking in favour of the Schism Bill in 1714,

⁵ See David Armitage, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, p. xxxii. Earlier scholarship includes Stephen, *History of English thought*; Norman Torrey, *Voltaire and the English deists* (New Haven, 1930); D. G. James, *The life of reason: Hobbes, Locke, Bolingbroke* (London, 1949); Walter Mackintosh Merrill, *From statesman to philosopher: a study in Bolingbroke's deism* (London, 1949).

⁶ H. T. Dickinson, *Bolingbroke* (London, 1970), pp. xi, 164. See also Alfred Owen Aldridge, 'Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke', *Philological quarterly*, 31:1 (1952), pp. 14, 20; Bernard Cottret (ed.), *Bolingbroke's political writings: the conservative Enlightenment* (London and New York, 1997), p. 8.

⁷ Robert Harley was raised to the peerage as earl of Oxford in 1711.

Bolingbroke pointedly argued that ‘it was a Bill of the last importance, since it concerns the security of the Church of England, which is the best and firmest support of the monarchy’.⁸ Bolingbroke engaged in religious questions on just two occasions in twelve years. He did so when his stock was low among high-churchmen who had never resolved the tensions generated by choosing between the exclusivity of the Church of England and a Roman Catholic king who undermined the privileges of the Church by prerogative.

Bolingbroke also needed to compensate for his own religious skeletons. His stepmother hailed from a French-Swiss Huguenot family. His grandmother appears to have had puritan inclinations and was reputedly patroness to such Nonconformist ministers as Daniel Burgess and Dr Thomas Manton. In a letter to Jonathan Swift in 1721, Bolingbroke indicated that Manton had influenced his education: ‘I resolve, since I am this morning in the humour of scribbling, to make my letter at least as long as one of your sermons, and if you do not mend my next shall be as long as one of Dr Manton’s, who taught my youth to yawn, and prepar’d me to be an High church man, that I might never hear him read, nor read him more.’⁹ It was also rumoured that Bolingbroke had attended a Dissenting academy. During the debates on the Schism Bill, the whig Nicholas Lechmere MP alluded to Bolingbroke ‘who had been bred among schismatics’ and was, ‘or, at least pretended to be, [among] the strongest supporters of the established church’.¹⁰ Thomas, marquess of Wharton, quipped that ‘persons who had been educated in dissenting academies... appear the most forward in suppressing them’.¹¹ Bolingbroke’s rakish personal life and antipathy for orthodox Christianity cast further doubt upon his suitability for the highest of offices.¹² In *A journal to Stella* (written between 1710 and 1713), Swift supposed that Bolingbroke conformed occasionally to qualify for office. Like ‘several rakes’, it was not ‘for piety, but employments; according to Act of Parliament’.¹³

After 1715, Bolingbroke claimed that his attitude towards the church-state relationship had been broadly consistent with Revolution principles. He never manifested support for *jure divino* monarchy or episcopacy. In his communications with the Old Pretender he attempted in vain to convince him to convert to Anglicanism. As Bolingbroke recalled in his apologia, *A letter to Sir William Wyndham* (1717), ‘We of the laity had nothing

⁸ *Debates and speeches in both houses of parliament concerning the Schism-Bill* (London, 1715), p. 6.

⁹ Bolingbroke to Jonathan Swift, 28 July 1721, in *The correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1963-5), II, p. 398.

¹⁰ William Cobbett (ed.), *The parliamentary history of England*, 36 vols. (London, 1806-20), VI, p. 1351.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1352.

¹² See Dickinson, *Bolingbroke*, p. 119.

¹³ Jonathan Swift, *The works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Walter Scott, 19 vols. (Edinburgh, 1814), II, p. 415.

more to do than to lay in our claim, that we could never submit to be governed by a prince who was not of the religion of our country.'¹⁴ The Pretender's Roman Catholic faith was founded neither 'on the love of virtue and the detestation of vice' nor 'on a sense of that obedience which is due to the will of the Supreme Being; and a sense of those obligations which creatures formed to live in a mutual dependence on one another lie under'. James was only capable of 'blind submission to the church of Rome, and a strict adherence to all the terms of that communion'. There was 'on him no tincture of the religion of a prince'.¹⁵ Bolingbroke was rehearsing the standard Christian Reformist claim that a godly Roman Catholic prince was oxymoronic, since he would return the laity to priestly and civil tyranny.

It is sometimes supposed that Walpole and his bishops constructed an ecclesiastical consensus that reduced the religious drama of the post-Revolutionary years.¹⁶ But there was renewed agitation during the 1730s over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts with Dissenters petitioning parliament during the 1732-3 session. The toleration debate occasioned the controversy that followed the sermon preached by Francis Hare, ministerialist bishop of Chichester, on King Charles Day in 1732.¹⁷ Hare opposed repeal using commonplace attacks on regicidal puritans. A pro-toleration element of the court seized on the sermon to discredit his position by casting him as a crypto-Jacobite.¹⁸ There were also controversies surrounding the Tithe Bill (1731), Church Rates and Repairs Bill (1733), Ecclesiastical Courts Bills (1733 and 1734), Quakers Tithe Bill (1736), and Mortmain Bill (1736).¹⁹

It is equally misleading to suppose that the anti-ministerialists were ideologically cohesive.²⁰ Bolingbroke steered a middle course between dissident whigs who believed the king's prime minister was undermining the Revolution and Tories who cared little for Revolution principles. Bolingbroke first needed to renounce his high-flying and Jacobite past. In his *Dissertation upon parties* (1733), he recalled that, whereas post-Revolutionary whigs had been the party of the 'power and majesty of the people, an original contract, the authority and independency of Parliament, liberty, resistance, exclusion, abdication, deposition', Queen

¹⁴ Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *The works of Lord Bolingbroke*, 4 vols. (London, 1844), I, p. 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁶ For classic statements, see Harvey C. Mansfield Jr, *Statesmanship and party government: a study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (London, 1965), pp. 42; Holmes, *Trial of Dr Sacheverell*, pp. 275-6; Owen, *Eighteenth century*, p. 13.

¹⁷ For the cult of Charles I, see Andrew Lacey, *The cult of King Charles the martyr* (Woodbridge, 2003).

¹⁸ Linda Colley, *In defiance of oligarchy: the tory party, 1714-60* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 104-15.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Stephen Taylor, 'Sir Robert Walpole, the Church of England, and the Quakers Tithe Bill of 1736', *Historical journal*, 28:1 (1985), 51-77.

²⁰ See Alexander Pettit, *Illusory consensus: Bolingbroke and the polemical response to Walpole, 1730-1737* (London, 1997).

Anne tories had been committed to 'Divine hereditary, indefeasible right, lineal succession, passive-obedience, prerogative, non-resistance, slavery, nay and sometimes popery too'.²¹

The party labels of whiggism and toryism, he argued, had emerged during the exclusion crisis. Partisan identification with other issues, including the relationship between parliament and crown, Dissent, the Church of England, and Roman Catholicism, turned upon the question of exclusion. But when James opted for both arbitrary civil rule and prerogative toleration, he united whigs and tories. The Revolution balanced the need to defend the church through the Test and Corporation Acts with toleration of inward consciences.²² There was no need to relieve Dissenters still further because the penal laws 'have not been these many years a terror'. Those laws which 'were designed to hinder the propagation of their principles, and those which shut the door of all public preferment, even to such amongst them as conformed occasionally' were also repealed. Yet those politicians, like himself, who 'have been reputed their enemies', he emphasised, 'and who have acted as such on several occasions, acknowledge their error'.²³

Bolingbroke thereby hoped to persuade the public that religious dividing lines were no longer significant. The 'polemical skill of [Charles] Leslie' and the 'antique erudition of [Hilkiah] Bedford', both nonjuring divines and defenders of patriarchalist monarchy, represented nothing more than 'those old shackles of false law, false reason, and false gospel'.²⁴ The mainstay of Bolingbroke's opposition to Walpole was instead built upon country suspicion of the alliance between the whig ministry and the 'monied interest' created by the fiscal-military state.²⁵ The opposition repeatedly claimed to be acting in the interest of patriotism, attacking the ministry on the more obvious issues of the land forces and control of the House of Commons.²⁶ Bolingbroke accused Walpole of overturning the Revolution settlement and 'the civil faith of the old Whigs'.²⁷

Occasionally, Bolingbroke could unite dissident whigs and old tories by attacking those whig bishops who, Bolingbroke claimed, kept Walpole in place. On several occasions,

²¹ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 5.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ For a classic account of the fiscal-military state, see John Brewer, *The sinews of power: war, money, and the English state, 1688-1783* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

²⁶ See Quentin Skinner, 'The principles and practice of opposition: the case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole', in *Historical perspectives: studies in English thought and society in honour of J. H. Plumb*, ed. Neil McKendrick (London, 1974), pp. 99-100.

²⁷ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 8.

Walpole relied on the support of ‘church whigs’ to shore up his parliamentary majorities.²⁸ Bolingbroke hoped not to ‘suffer the arch slyness of G—... the dogmatical dryness of H—... or the sousing superstition of S—’ as they attempted ‘to slip new shackles on us, which are inconsistent with the constituent principles of our establishment’.²⁹ The trio of whig bishops to whom Bolingbroke referred were: Gibson, now known as ‘Walpole’s pope’; Hare, Walpole’s tutor at Cambridge and author of *Church authority vindicated* (1713) and *Scripture vindicated from the misrepresentation of the bishop of Bangor* (1721); and Thomas Sherlock, school-friend to Walpole, successor to Gibson as bishop of London, and another antagonist of Hoadly.

Bolingbroke launched *The craftsman* with the dissident whig, William Pulteney, in December 1726. Appearing on Mondays and Wednesdays, it soon underwent major change and became the *Country journal: or, the craftsman* in May 1727.³⁰ In total, Bolingbroke acknowledged his authorship of forty-four contributions but Simon Varey has suggested that he authored many more unacknowledged contributions.³¹ The journal carried some of those works for which Bolingbroke has become most renowned, including *Remarks on the history of England* (running from 13 June 1730 to 22 May 1731) and the *Dissertation* (running from 27 October 1733 to 26 January 1734). Following the defeat of the opposition in the general election of 1734, Bolingbroke abandoned *The craftsman* and again retired to France where he seems to have composed the essay *On the spirit of patriotism* in 1736 before it was published in 1749. Perhaps Bolingbroke’s most famous work, *The idea of a patriot king* was composed in 1738 after his return to England. The former work was addressed to Henry Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, one of the aristocratic ‘boy patriots’ elected in 1734. The latter work seems to have been connected with the circle gathered around Prince Frederick at Leicester House. While in England, Bolingbroke was staying with Pope when a request appears to have been sent from Frederick’s secretary George Lyttelton that Pope write to advise the increasingly popular prince.³² In the end it was Bolingbroke who did so.

²⁸ Cobbett (ed.), *Parliamentary history*, VIII, pp. 789, 841, 882, 992, 1177-9; IX, p. 336.

²⁹ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 10.

³⁰ Simon Varey, ‘Introduction’, in Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Contributions to the Craftsman*, ed. Simon Varey (Oxford, 1982), pp. xiii-xv; M. R. A. Harris, ‘Figures relating to the printing and distribution of the *Craftsman* 1726 to 1730’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XLIII (1970), 233-42.

³¹ See *The last will and testament of the late Rt. Hon. Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* (London, 1752), pp. 8-9; Varey, ‘Introduction’, in Bolingbroke, *Contributions to the Craftsman*, p. xv.

³² David Armitage, ‘Introduction’, in Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. xxi.

Natural religion and priestcraft

Having dispensed with the complexities of Bolingbroke's career, it is now possible to pursue his civil religion. Over the course of his life, following exile to France and his investigations into religion during the 1720s and 1730s, Bolingbroke composed extensive philosophical works which he never published. Most of these philosophical writings were revised during the years following the death of Wyndham in 1740 and the fall of Walpole in 1742. They were published in 1754, three years after Bolingbroke's death, upon Bolingbroke's instructions to his literary executor, David Mallet.³³ The longest of these works, *Letters or essays addressed to Alexander Pope*, were composed in dialogue form with the Roman Catholic poet, and Bolingbroke chose to dedicate them to Pope after their extensive conversations between 1725 and 1735.³⁴ Remaining fragments and minutes of essays were also gathered together. The *Letters on the study and use of history*, which were written in Chanteloup between 1735 and 1738, *Reflections upon exile*, and *Of the use of retirement and study* were published by Mallet in March 1752. In 1753, Mallet followed up with a volume containing such works as *A letter to Sir William Wyndham* and *Reflections on the present state of the nation*. In 1754, Mallet produced the collected works.

Bolingbroke's conception of civil religion rested on the claim that natural religion was morally coterminous with primitive Christianity. He argued that there were sufficient proofs in nature for the existence of one infinitely wise and powerful supreme being, or the first intelligent cause of all things, to be uncovered purely by the exercise of reason, observation, and experiment. In *The substance of some letters written originally in French, about the year 1720, to M. de Pouilly*, Bolingbroke argued that natural phenomena provided sufficient evidence for the 'existence of an all-perfect, self-existent being, the source of all existence, invisible and incomprehensible'.³⁵ These proofs were revealed not by divine intervention but by nature and reason. Bolingbroke crisply summarised his position in one of his essays to Pope in *Concerning authority in matters of religion*. Natural theology 'rests on better foundation than authority of any kind, and the duties of natural religion, and the sins against it, are held out to us by the constitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters so visible, that he who runs may read them'. The religion of nature, 'and therefore the God of nature, is simple and plain', since it 'tells us nothing which our reason is unable to

³³ See *Last will and testament*, especially pp. 8-10.

³⁴ Bolingbroke, *Works*, IV, p. 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, p. 464.

comprehend'. Natural religion and reason always agreed because 'they are always the same, and the whole economy of God's dispensations to man is of a piece'.³⁶

Such a deistical conception of natural religion might render implausible the suggestion that Bolingbroke was a principled supporter of Christianity. But Bolingbroke insisted that gospel Christianity represented the apex of natural religion. In *Concerning authority in matters of religion*, he defended 'the articles of belief, which Christ himself exacted by what he said, and by what he did'. The 'system of religion, which Christ published, and his evangelists recorded is a complete system to all the purposes of true religion, natural and revealed'.³⁷ Even the deistical aristocrat might rationally endorse the primitive gospel and make it a basis from which to lead a moral and religious life.

Because it was plain and simple, natural religion was available to all by exercise of reason. In *Concerning authority in matters of religion*, Bolingbroke stated, 'I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myself in all those cases where reason alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itself; for even in the others, reason is the judge of the authority.' The idea of a sacerdotal priestly hierarchy distinct from the laity carried no rational or scriptural justification. The 'divine, or the philosopher, may intend to deceive us'. Clergymen had no sacerdotal power by some privilege to witness the 'sublime objects of divine philosophy' because 'God has dealt more equally with his human creatures'. The 'all-wise God' rendered the universe so that 'every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring certain and sufficient knowledge of those things where are the most important to him'.³⁸

However, natural religion had been corrupted over many centuries. He accused Saint Paul of being the first to destroy Christian purity by grafting pagan doctrines onto scripture. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the trinity, and future rewards and punishments were all corruptly sourced from the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. Paul added his own inventions including predestination and passive obedience. As Bolingbroke wrote to Swift, priestly Christianity became 'a lofty & pompous structure erected close to the humble & plain building of Natural Religion'.³⁹ Christ's articles of belief 'have been lengthened immeasurably, and we may add both unnecessarily and presumptuously by others since his time'.⁴⁰ Another key source of spiritual corruption was Platonism. It had become the basis for the artificial theology of orthodox Christianity by replacing rational proofs with metaphysics.

³⁶ Ibid., III, pp. 380-1.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 418.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 376.

³⁹ Bolingbroke to Swift, 12 September 1724, in *Correspondence of Swift*, III, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 418.

Bolingbroke complained how natural philosophy ‘made little progress among the Greeks and the Romans’.⁴¹ Aristotle was singled out, partly because of his influence over scholasticism, as ‘that usurper & Tyrant’. In a letter to Wyndham dated 16 June 1740, Bolingbroke recommended Locke’s *An essay concerning human understanding* (1689) and Francis Bacon’s *Novum organum* (1620) to Wyndham’s son to counteract ‘Greek Dialectics’.⁴²

Bolingbroke’s attack on orthodox Christianity was fully deist. He rejected the doctrine of particular providence and replaced it with general providence. Revelation was simply another superstition fabricated by priests to suppress the exercise of individual rationality. Clerics sought ‘to maintain the insufficiency of human reason, though God thought it so sufficient’, and they boasted ‘the necessity of a revelation that might supply the defects of reason’. By rendering natural moral law mysterious and decipherable only with ‘a profound knowledge of theology’, the clerical order could advance its own power.⁴³ Religion founded on revelation was mere priestcraft. Such religions ‘grow voluminous and mysterious, oppose belief to knowledge, and when they cannot stand a reasonable examination, escape from reason by assuming that they are above it’.⁴⁴

This deistical onslaught involved deep suspicion of the provenance of scripture. Bolingbroke described the phenomenon of priestcraft by reference to Barbeyrac. Responding to Barbeyrac’s translation of sermons by Tillotson, Bolingbroke condemned the ‘gross defects, and palpable falsehoods, in almost every page of the Scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such as no man, who acknowledges a Supreme, All-perfect Being, can believe it to be his word’. He could not believe the claim that ‘the Pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, were written under a divine influence, and have any right to be called the word of God’.⁴⁵ The laws of Moses should not be considered as ‘means of preserving monotheism, and the purity of worship, in opposition to polytheism and superstition’, since they were derived from ‘a multitude and ceremonies, founded in the superstitions of Egypt’.⁴⁶

Bolingbroke applied sceptical principles of historical study to scripture, treating the accepted holy texts as temporal products of human acts.⁴⁷ He claimed that scripture was never of divine authorship and that there was no evidence for Moses’ authorship of the

⁴¹ Ibid., II, p. 495.

⁴² Bolingbroke to Sir William Wyndham, 16 June 1740, in *The unpublished letters of Henry St John, First Viscount Bolingbroke*, ed. Adrian Lashmore-Davies, 5 vols. (London, 2013), V, p. 255.

⁴³ Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 402.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 381.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 32-3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁷ See Isaac Kramnick, ‘Editor’s introduction’, Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Historical writings*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Chicago and London, 1972), p. xxviii-xxxvii.

Pentateuch.⁴⁸ Following Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, Bolingbroke also argued that there was no evidence that the Old Testament Jews merited special divine anointment.⁴⁹ He observed that ‘history has been purposely and systematically falsified in all ages, and that partiality and prejudice have occasioned both voluntary and involuntary errors even in the best’. The greatest culprit was ‘ecclesiastical authority [which] had led the way to this corruption in all ages, and all religions’. Even though Christianity was founded in truth, ‘yet what numberless fables have been invented to raise, to embellish, and to support these structures according to the interest and taste of the several architects?’⁵⁰

Priestcraft was, therefore, a phenomenon that drew inspiration from ‘the propagation of error in natural theology, as it descended from the Egyptians and other nations to the Greeks’ and was institutionalised by Paul.⁵¹ It followed that priestcraft was not a purely Christian phenomenon, for ‘the great principle that maintained all the corruptions of natural religion, was that of priestcraft’. It was a product of the union between philosophy and theology. In priest-ridden religions, philosophers and priests ‘were the same persons’. Even when ‘they assumed their distinct characters, the priests were too powerful, and the people too bigotted, to hope for any reformation’. Any rational opposition to superstition was simply and successfully condemned as atheism. The consequence was that ‘the whole scheme of religion was applied then, as it is in many countries, Christian and others, still, to the advantage of those who has the conduct of it’.⁵²

The imbalance between the civil and ecclesiastical power was a consequence of superstitious priestcraft. In Christian societies, ‘the constitution of the Christian church, by which the peace of the world was laid, in the first ages of Christianity’, was now ‘at the mercy of an order of men, who indulge their passions, and find their account several ways in disturbing it’. Since its establishment by Constantine, true Christianity had fallen victim to episcopal treachery. Even though there were ‘some few good and learned but not infallible men’ within the body of the fourth-century clergy, they were for the most part ‘ignorant, contentious, and profligate’. Church councils were ‘riotous assemblies, governed by intrigue, and celebrated with noise, confusion, and the greatest indecency’.⁵³ The council of Nicaea was a site of ‘several superstitious sports’.⁵⁴ The state of the church did not improve in later

⁴⁸ Bolingbroke, *Works*, II, p. 495.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 237.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 238-9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III, p. 505.

ages of the Roman Empire, for, 'as learning and knowledge decreased in the latter empire, the imposition of ecclesiastical authority grew up'. Both 'the power and discipline' of the church became 'as independent of the civil authority' as its 'doctrines'.⁵⁵

The power of the church proved so great that it survived the fall of the Roman Empire. It bequeathed the corrupt church-state relationship to medieval popery. 'Christianity had not been established many centuries in the West, before a claim to universal property was set foot in favor of the faithful, that is of Christians', and the bishop of Rome claimed 'universal empire, not only over the religious, but over all civil societies'.⁵⁶ Roman Catholic priests developed 'what has been seen very often since among the clergy, a sort of holy ambition' which 'proved as strong a motive in the hearts of good men transported by a mistaken zeal for the church, whose cause they confounded with the cause of religion'.⁵⁷ Lay believers were duped by false superstitions and mysteries which shrouded natural religion 'to advance, under pious pretences, the grandeur, wealth, and dominion of the religions over the civil society'. Priests 'established a church as independent on the state'. But such popery remained a danger in Reformed societies. Bemoaning how the doctrine of the trinity was enshrined in the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, Bolingbroke commented in *Concerning matters of authority in religion* that 'the church has been in every age an hydra, such a monster as the poets feign with many heads' and that the 'scene of Christianity has been always a scene of dissension, of hatred, of persecution, and of blood'.⁵⁸

Bolingbroke and the alliance between church and state

It was at this juncture that Bolingbroke took aim at Warburton and his *Alliance between church and state*. Warburton had begun life as a scholarly parochial clergyman, whose literary fame and theological prowess led to his appointment in 1740 as chaplain to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and later to George II.⁵⁹ Warburton first courted notoriety when he defended the disputed Christian orthodoxy of Pope, a mutual friend of Warburton and Bolingbroke, in

⁵⁵ Ibid., IV, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid., III, p. 492.

⁵⁷ Ibid., IV, p. 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 24-5.

⁵⁹ For biographical details on Warburton, see A. W. Evans, *Warburton and the Warburtonians: a study in some eighteenth-century controversies* (London, 1932); Robert M. Ryley, *William Warburton* (Boston, MA, 1984). For Warburton's reception by Voltaire and the authors of the *Encyclopédie*, see Frank Manuel, *The eighteenth century confronts the gods* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), p. 122; Clifton Cherpeck, 'Warburton and the *Encyclopédie*', *Comparative literature*, 7 (1955), 226-39; J. H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire and Warburton* (Geneva, 1961), pp. 43-4.

Pope's *Essay on man* (1734).⁶⁰ Warburton's reputation as a defender of orthodox Christianity was secured by critical works against Hume and Bolingbroke.⁶¹ Warburton wrote the *Alliance* in an attempt to reconcile theories of civil religion with sacerdotal priesthoods. He believed his conception of the church-state relationship was a deliberate compromise between popish principles that rendered 'the State a creature of the Church' and Erastians who left 'the Church a Creature of the State'. His argument was also with 'the PRESBYTERIAN [who] would regulate the State on Church Ideas; the HOBBEIST, the Church, on Reasons of State: And, to compleat the Farce, the QUAKER [who] abolishes the very Being of a Church; and the MENNONITE [Anabaptist] [who] suppresses the Office of the Civil Magistrate'.⁶²

Warburton attempted to secure ecclesiological compromise by reconciling sacerdotal Anglican priests with the superiority of the civil magistrate in a learned and pastoral established ministry. He believed that church and state had originally been two separate societies but were compacted together in a grand contract for the Christian well-being of the laity and security of the state. Both church and state were originally '*Sovereign, and independent on the other*', but the governors of the church later ceded this independence in a '*free Convention*' with the state.⁶³ The contract was to be found 'in the same *Archive* with the famous ORIGINAL COMPACT between Magistrate and People'.⁶⁴ It formed '*a politic League and Alliance for mutual Support and Defence*'. The church establishment would 'APPLY ITS UTMOST INFLUENCE IN THE SERVICE OF THE STATE'. The state would 'SUPPORT AND PROTECT THE CHURCH'.⁶⁵ The terms of the contract between church and state stipulated that the function of the civil magistrate was the protection of the 'TEMPORAL LIBERTY AND PROPERTY OF MAN'.⁶⁶ It was also the inculcation of the morals of men insofar as they affected civil tranquillity. These morals involved 'three fundamental Principles of Natural Religion', including the existence, being, and providence of God and the natural difference between

⁶⁰ William Warburton, *A vindication of Mr. Pope's Essay on man* (London, 1739); *A critical and philosophical commentary on Mr. Pope's Essay on man* (London, 1742). For the rivalry between Warburton and Bolingbroke, which revolved around their mutual friendship with Pope, see Alexander Pope, *The correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), IV, pp. 402, 488-520.

⁶¹ William Warburton, *A view of Lord Bolingbroke's philosophy*, 3 vols. (London 1754-6); *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the natural history of religion* (London, 1757).

⁶² William Warburton, *The alliance between church and state*, 4th edn (London, 1766), p. 28. For a fuller exposition of Warburton's ecclesiology, see Stephen Taylor, 'William Warburton and the alliance of church and state', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 43:2 (1992), 271-86. For interpretations of Warburton within Enlightened divinity, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 171-212; Robert, G. Ingram, 'William Warburton, divine action, and Enlightened Christianity', in *Religious identities in Britain, 1660-1832*, eds. William Gibson and Robert G. Ingram (Burlington, VT, 2005) 97-117.

⁶³ Warburton, *Alliance*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 112.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

good and evil. Such precepts, rooted in primitive Christianity, formed ‘the very Foundation and Bond of Civil Policy’.⁶⁷

However, the church establishment retained its divine right over doctrine and discipline. Questions of faith stood beyond the remit of the secular powers. Instead, they belonged to the church as ‘CHRIST’S KINGDOM’ on earth. It was a society of ‘divine appointment’, at first ‘declared Sovereign’. The free convention between church and state stipulated that the church establishment would receive maintenance for its ministers through tithing, ecclesiastical jurisdiction over doctrinal discipline including the reformation of manners, and the right to sit in the legislature. The church would receive protection from external violence including a test act. In return, the state secured recognition of its sovereignty.⁶⁸ Thus Warburton gave a tacit nod to anti-sacerdotal arguments. He claimed that his vision of the church-state relationship would prevent the ‘Evil’ that the church as an independent society might wreak over the state. He averred how ‘coercive Power introduces an *Imperium in Imperio*’.⁶⁹

Warburton was thereby defending the novel Revolution settlement by which the Church of England was maintained by the Test Act but acquiesced to statutory toleration. It was the duty of the Christian magistrate to provide succour and support for true religion consistent with the Protestant principle of liberty of conscience. An ‘ESTABLISHED RELIGION AND A TEST-LAW’ were built upon ‘THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE LAW OF NATURE AND NATIONS’.⁷⁰ In 1763 Warburton argued that the ‘most just of all Public Laws, the Law of TOLERATION... is certainly of DIVINE ORIGINAL’.⁷¹ In a religiously plural society, a test act was necessary to secure the commitment made by the state to defend the church establishment. By protecting the establishment, the civil magistrate allowed the public faith to act as a moral sanctifier of the social and political order. Established religions taught the moral and social virtues but Christianity, by its primitive precepts, was the most useful to the state. Within Christianity ‘public Utility and Truth do coincide’.⁷² A public ministry, learned and pastoral, served public utility by searching for truth to procure ‘*the Favour of God*’ and to ‘*advance and improve our own intellectual Nature*’.⁷³ In his posthumous pamphlet, *Directions for the study of philosophy*, written around 1769, Warburton especially recommended for clergymen

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 216.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷¹ William Warburton, *The doctrine of grace* (London, 1763), pp. 189-90.

⁷² Warburton, *Alliance*, p. 347.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 52.

‘the daily and long continued use’ of Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding* in order ‘to think justly’. Also important were Cudworth, Stillingfleet, Chillingworth, Hooker, Taylor, Burnet, and Samuel Clarke.⁷⁴

Warburton’s argument was similar with that of another of Bolingbroke’s clerical opponents, Gibson. In his *Codex*, Gibson studied the legal, juridical, and ecclesiastical documents of the Reformation. He argued that the royal supremacy did not automatically involve jurisdiction over questions of doctrine and faith. The terms of the royal supremacy banished popish usurpation of temporal power, but respected the ‘*Divine Right*’ of the Church of England ‘to the Exercise of Spiritual Disciplin’. The bishops held ‘a general Authority from the *Word of God*, to exercise Disciplin in the Church’. Meanwhile the godly prince was the ultimate source of all temporal power, acting ‘as Supreme and Sovereign in the State’ and ‘as Supreme Head of the Church.’⁷⁵ The ‘*External Administration*’ of the Church came ‘from the *Crown* and in Subordination to the *Royal Supremacy*’. Much like Warburton, Gibson calibrated his argument against tory high-churchmanship and those who would render the church a complete ‘*Creature of the State*’.⁷⁶

Despite maintaining a conception of sacerdotal priestliness, Gibson also believed in learned and pastoral ministry to fight superstition and enthusiasm. In an anonymous pamphlet written during the campaign during the 1730s to repeal the Test Act, Gibson argued that a national church was ‘the best Means of promoting Religion, and preserving Peace and Order in the State’.⁷⁷ He insisted that ‘the strength and clearness of the evidences of Christianity with the advantages and excellencies of the Gospel institution’ were sufficient props to civil order.⁷⁸ In 1737, Gibson published *Some considerations upon pluralities, non-residence and salaries of curates* in which he justified pluralities for those who were ‘very well worthy for their learning’ and held at least a Master of the Arts. He reminded his audience that ‘a well-meaning zeal might not always be attended with cool and sedate thinking’.⁷⁹ As bishop of London, Gibson composed a series of ‘pastoral letters’ beginning in 1728. The letters stood in the tradition of Tillotson’s circular letter of 1692 to the bishops and Burnet’s *Discourse of the pastoral care*. Gibson hoped to compose ‘some few rules, which were very short and easy

⁷⁴ William Warburton, *The works of the right reverend William Warburton*, 12 vols. (London, 1811), X, pp. 357, 358-360, 363, 365, 366, 368, 371, 373.

⁷⁵ Edmund Gibson, *Codex juris ecclesiastici Anglicani*, 2 vols. (London, 1713), I, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁷ Edmund Gibson, *The dispute adjusted, about the proper time of applying for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (London, 1732), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁸ Edmund Gibson, *The bishop of London’s second pastoral letter* (London, 1730), p. 75.

⁷⁹ Edmund Gibson, *Some considerations upon pluralities, non-residence and salaries of curates* (London, 1737), p. 10.

and which, being frequently perused and duly attended to, might be a means... to preserve sincere and unprejudiced Christians from those dangerous infections'.⁸⁰

Warburton and Gibson engaged with lay concepts of civil religion by attempting to strike a middle course between tory high-churchmen and Erastians who denied priests a mediating power. But Bolingbroke, who believed the earthly church was entirely a creation of the state, believed Warburton had gone too far. The idea of 'a formal alliance between the church and the state, as between two independent distinct powers, is a very groundless and whimsical notion'. If there had been any alliances, Bolingbroke rehearsed the standard Protestant line that princes throughout history had continually struck tyrannous agreements with ecclesiastics. A 'fraudulent or silent compact between princes and priests became very real, as soon as an ecclesiastical order was established'. Absolutist princes agreed 'to reverence the divine right of the clergy', provided the priests, 'in return, made use of their influence over consciences to establish an opinion of a divine right in them'.⁸¹ In his essays to Pope, Bolingbroke noted that that 'paradoxical acquaintance of yours', Warburton, had assumed the original independence of the two institutions. Warburton neglected that the state must concede greater legitimacy to the ecclesiastical body, since the church's legitimacy was 'derived from a greater authority than her own'. The 'supposed terms of union' would be construed as 'concessions of the religious society to the civil, for the sake of order and peace', rather than 'grants of the civil to the religious society'.⁸²

By attacking the compact between arbitrary princes and tyrannical ecclesiastics, Bolingbroke was safely on whig territory. In a contribution to *The craftsman* in September 1734, he described how arbitrary princes, 'are reduced to maintain an Opinion, which draws after it great Danger, and is the strongest Invitation to the Attempts of their ambitious Subjects'. The supposition 'that Princes are in Themselves SACRED, when once They mount the Throne, though the Means, by which They rose to it, were ever so flagitious', and was now discredited. Bolingbroke noted how ancient princes had claimed sacerdotal authority in order to legitimise their rulership. Those princes, 'particularly the heathen Emperors, used to *deify* Themselves, with a View of obliging the People, from a religious Reverence, to submit patiently to their Extravagances'. However, *jure divino* modern monarchies were 'but Copies

⁸⁰ Edmund Gibson, *The bishop of London's pastoral letter* (London, 1728), p. 4.

⁸¹ Bolingbroke, *Works*, IV, p. 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*, III, pp. 489-90.

of this Original, and calculated to the same Views'. Fortunately, 'the People have been wise enough, in these Kingdoms, to explode such dangerous and iniquitous Superstitions'.⁸³

But the relationship between superstition and tyranny extended further than modern princes. In the opening edition of *The craftsman* in December 1726, the author likened the techniques used by priests to develop their ecclesiastical tyranny to the craft used by Walpole and the ministerialists to support their civil tyranny. The author aimed 'to lay open the frauds, abuses and secret iniquities of all professions' and their 'pernicious mixtures of craft, and several scandalous prostitutions'. He noted how the 'same malignant contagion has infected the other learned faculties and polite professions'. It 'crept into the camp as well as the court' and 'prevailed in the church as well as in the state'.⁸⁴ In January 1736, Bolingbroke wrote a letter to his brother-in-law in anticipation of the *Idea of a patriot king* in which he likened ministerialist practitioners of craft to the priests of Baal: 'Whatever happens, it will be a comfort to me that I have had the opportunity before my death of contributing to revive the true spirit of Constitution in Great Britain... The victim may be saved even though the same butcherly priests should continue to administer our political Rites. Or, who knows? a zealous high priest may arise, and these priests of Baal may be hewed in pieces'.⁸⁵

It is often supposed that Bolingbroke's attack on 'craft' was secular and anti-ministerialist in character.⁸⁶ But this reading risks separating 'craft' from 'priestcraft'. There was also a strong Reformed ecclesiological current within Bolingbroke's definition of the crafts by which tyranny was imposed. *The craftsman* was written and signed by the pseudonymous Caleb D'Anvers, a choice of name that itself indicated more than just loyalty to Revolution principles and the Hanoverian succession. The name Anvers, French for Antwerp, indicated loyalty to the cause of the Holy Roman Empire, under which Antwerp was then ruled, and opposition to the Jacobites. The name Caleb was taken from the Old Testament son of Jephynneh, one of the leaders of the Israelites sent into the promised land as a scout.⁸⁷ The Biblical choice of name is instructive: having slain the priests of Baal, Hanoverian England was to be a new Israel governed by true religion.

⁸³ Bolingbroke, *Contributions to the Craftsman*, pp. 172-3.

⁸⁴ Caleb d'Anvers, *The craftsman*, 1 (5 December 1726).

⁸⁵ Bolingbroke to his brother-in-law, 25 January 1736, reprinted in Walter Sichel, *Bolingbroke and his times: the sequel* (New York, 1968), pp. 545-6.

⁸⁶ Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle: the politics of nostalgia in the age of Walpole* (London, 1968), pp. 19-20; Skinner, 'Principles and practice of opposition', pp. 95, 113-21.

⁸⁷ For Jewish sources in early modern political thought, see Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew republic: Jewish sources and the transformation of European political thought* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

Civil and ecclesiastical polity

Given the strong deistical tendency of Bolingbroke's religious writings, he might appear an unlikely candidate for a Christian civil religion rooted in reverence for the Church of England with its unreformed articles of faith. However, Bolingbroke's defence of an established church was based on standard propositions in the traditions of Erastianism and Christian Reform. His suspicions about the doctrine of the trinity and the authorship of scripture implied reform to the Church of England. But, until the state of Christian theological opinion had progressed, Bolingbroke still believed in respecting the church establishment. His was a Ciceronian *religio* without *superstitio* and he relied upon the distinction between esoteric and exoteric philosophy to conceive aristocratic rulership involving prudent respect for popular belief. Nevertheless, he believed even an impure Church of England replete with superstitious doctrines like the trinity could form the basis for Christian civil religion.

In defending his vision of the church-state relationship, Bolingbroke drew from standard episodes in the history of Christian Reform. The establishment of the Christian church under Constantine created the occasion for a godly Christian *imperator*, which was missed due to episcopal power. After Constantine, princes 'might have made themselves heads of the church, defenders of the faith, and, next under God and his Son Christ Jesus, supreme moderators and governors in all matters, ecclesiastical and civil, without being priests'. On some occasions, Constantine and his successors had taken 'airs of supremacy'. Because they had failed to preserve 'a steady exercise of the pontifical power over ecclesiastical affairs and ecclesiastical persons in the Christian church, the exercise of it devolved of course on the bishops'.⁸⁸ Roman emperors should have been able to keep 'the whole power over ecclesiastical as well as civil affairs in their own hands, and have applied the former to preserve order and discipline, to prevent abuse and corruption in the Christian, as it had been their prerogative and their duty to apply it in the heathen church'. Such a supremacy of the civil state was 'natural' and 'reasonable'.⁸⁹

The battle to secure the right relationship between church and state as well as true religion had recurred since the Constantinean establishment. In *Concerning authority in matters of religion*, Bolingbroke condemned 'Constantine's grant to Sylvester' as a forgery 'preserved in that grand repertoire of forgeries, the records of the Roman church'.⁹⁰ The battle between *imperium* and *sacerdos* was fought anew as 'the Guelphs and Ghibellines

⁸⁸ Bolingbroke, *Works*, pp. 503-4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

were not more animated against each other at any time, than the Tories and Whigs at this'. Even the French, 'good papists as they are', remained unconvinced by the supposed grant to Sylvester 'and the quarrel between Philip le Bel and Boniface the Eighth may be said to subsist even now'. Bolingbroke was citing the fourteenth-century clash between the French monarchy and the papacy which had occasioned the *Defensor pacis* (1324) and *Defensor minor* (c. 1342) of Marsilius. Bolingbroke observed that those 'who have shook off the Roman yoke entirely, admit still less of this ecclesiastical code' because Protestants 'reject every thing in it that is not conformable to the law of the state, and to the doctrines of the church, which this law has established'. In Hoadlyite tones, he concluded this passage by observing that 'Christ's kingdom is not of this world'.⁹¹

By taking control of the ecclesiastical power for the first time, those godly Protestant princes who led the Reformation had defeated the concept of *imperium in imperio* and begun to create the institutional conditions for the flourishing of true religion. It is common to conceptualise Bolingbroke's idea of a patriot king as a product of his deism.⁹² This casts the patriot king as a prince of superlative virtue who bestrode the natural order according to the general providence of the supreme being. The patriot king stood atop the balanced and mixed constitution and exercised the highest duties in the natural moral order. Those were 'the duties of a king to his country'.⁹³

However, the idea of patriot kingship owed as much to the tradition of Christian Reform as deism. In *Concerning authority in matters of religion*, Bolingbroke denied the Roman Catholic doctrine that 'the avowed ends of religious, and the real ends of civil societies, are so distinct as to require distinct powers, and a mutual independence'. According to the basic moral dictates of natural religion and primitive Christianity, the salvation of souls was an end of civil government. If 'to abstain from evil, and to do good works, be means of salvation', it followed that 'the means of salvation are objects of civil government'. It behove the godly prince to govern accordingly. 'It is the duty of princes and magistrates', Bolingbroke argued, 'to promote a strict observation to the law of nature, of private and public morality, and to make those who live in subjection to them good men, in order to make them good citizens.'⁹⁴ Virtue and morality fell within the Christian duties of the godly prince. Princes and magistrates punished transgressions of positive law as the reproduction of the law

⁹¹ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 51.

⁹² Mansfield, *Statesmanship and party government*, p. 42; Smith, *Georgian monarchy*, p. 21.

⁹³ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 217.

⁹⁴ Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 487.

of nature but also provided ‘rewards and encouragement to virtue’ as ‘the surest way, not only to reform the outward behaviour, but to create a habitual disposition to the practice of religion’.⁹⁵ Such a position should also be read as a civic exhortation for the peace and public good of the commonwealth.⁹⁶

Bolingbroke also measured the godliness of England’s princes. He praised Henry VIII as a king who destroyed the pope ‘in his dominions’ and gave ‘several incurable wounds’ to the church’s ownership of land that provided the economic basis for its spiritual tyranny.⁹⁷ In ‘this eager pursuit after ecclesiastical liberty’, ‘letters patent, under the great seal, were made necessary to determine the articles of faith, which men were to believe fully, and the doctrines, rites and ceremonies, which they were to observe and practice under several penalties’.⁹⁸ Elizabeth I represented the apotheosis of the godly prince. She supported the ‘oppressed people’ of the Netherlands and favoured Henry III and IV of France against the house of Lorraine as well as the French Protestants against the Medici.⁹⁹ Although, Bolingbroke conceded, the court of high commission might have had extraordinary power, ‘the steadiness of the queen, in maintaining this part of the prerogative’ and ‘the great moderation of the bishops in these early days of the reformation’ meant that its jurisdiction was exercised prudently.¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth produced a moderate ecclesiastical settlement, midway between Rome and Geneva, which ‘farther still from pushing any sort of men, puritans, and even papists, into despair’, aimed at equipoise. She maintained the Protestant principle of freedom of conscience even when ‘the bull of Pius Quintus, and the rebellion, and other attempts, consequent upon it, obliged her to procure new laws’. She wisely ‘distinguished “papists in conscience from papists in faction”’.¹⁰¹ Conversely, James I and Charles I were ungodly kings, having broken the compact between king and people by their absolutism.¹⁰²

Accompanying Bolingbroke’s account of the godly prince was a religiously neo-Harringtonian conceptualisation of property and power. He believed secular reforms to noble land ownership under Henry VII and the sale of church lands under Henry VIII provided the basis for the political developments of the seventeenth century. In the centuries between the decline of Saxon liberty during the Norman Conquest and the Henrician revolution in

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 487-8.

⁹⁶ See Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle*, pp. 104-5.

⁹⁷ Bolingbroke, *Historical writings*, p. 221.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 223-4.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 291-6, 330-9.

property, the commons ‘had not property enough to have any share in this power’ and ‘the sole check which could be opposed to the encroachments of the crown was the power of the barons and of the clergy’. However, the church and the nobility often had opposing interests ‘so that they were not only very incapable of forming a secure barrier to liberty, but their power became terrible and dangerous to the crown itself’. Nobility and church could both encroach ‘on the prince’s authority, whilst they resisted his encroachments, real or pretended, on their own privileges’. Under ‘the plausible veil of law, or gospel’, private ambition ‘had a greater share than public liberty in their contests’.¹⁰³

Erastian ecclesiology and religious neo-Harringtonianism coincided in the context of the legal and ecclesiastical framework of the long Reformation. When the church-state relationship was subverted, Bolingbroke had shown that its agents – the priests – were superstitious, powerful, and destabilising. They peddled false religion and used otherworldly metaphysics for corrupt worldly ends. They wrongly took their legitimacy as divine. They falsely claimed a privileged mediating relationship with God. As Warburton noted, Bolingbroke joined up with Shaftesbury, Trenchard, and Gordon in seeking to remove any remnant of sacerdotal authority from priests.¹⁰⁴ The true legitimacy of clergymen lay elsewhere. Since Christ’s kingdom was not of this world, ecclesiastical polity was merely a subset of temporal power. In England, it was the royal supremacy of the crown-in-parliament that set the clergy above the laity and their appointment was on the basis of Christian primitivism. The established church must teach ‘genuine Christianity’, which was ‘contained in the gospels’. It was ‘the word of God; it requires, therefore, our veneration, and a strict conformity to it.’ The established church must not preach ‘traditional Christianity... which passes for the genuine, and which we all profess, is derived from the writings of fathers and doctors of the church, and from the decrees of councils’.¹⁰⁵

Bolingbroke discussed the authority of the clergy in his fourth essay *Concerning authority in matters of religion*. He explained to Pope that Christ appointed the apostles as great religious teachers and not as divinely-ordained messengers. The idea of apostolic succession was ridiculous. Christ ‘sent out his apostles to teach and to baptise, and the utmost power he gave them, besides that of working miracles to convince and to convert, was to shake off the dust of their feet, and to protest against the infidelity of those, who refused to receive them and the gospel they published’. The apostles had a right of ordination over

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁰⁴ Warburton, *Works*, XII, p. 115.

¹⁰⁵ Bolingbroke, *Works*, IV, p. 109.

others 'to accompany and to succeed them in the same office, the office of teaching and baptising'. The apostles 'could give no more power than they received'.¹⁰⁶ Clergymen were appointed by human authority in order to minister the simple precepts of primitive Christianity. In all ages, clergymen must 'teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical simplicity as Christ himself did in his sermon on the mount and elsewhere'.¹⁰⁷

In so doing, clergymen would defend the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers. By their ministry, 'they might have enabled every one to be his own casuist, and have made good men as well as Christians'. Thus they might enlarge 'the kingdom of God'.¹⁰⁸ The clergy must only act by example and the civil power might choose to co-opt them into the civil state. An established clergy 'might co-operate with the civil magistrate very usefully no doubt'. They would do so 'by exhortations and reproofs, whereof they are seldom sparing, and much more by example, which can alone give efficacy to the former, and which is not, however, very frequently employed'. Clergymen were 'assistants to the civil magistrate, in concert with him, and in subordination to him'.¹⁰⁹ It was the role of true Christianity to prepare believers for the next life by means of good conduct in this one. Clergymen created moral and virtuous men whose precepts accorded with the interest of the civil state.

Bolingbroke discussed the role of the clergy anecdotally in a contribution to *The craftsman* in 1729. Referring to instances when 'venal Abuses were to grow in the *Senate* and the *Administration*', Bolingbroke wrote of a gentleman who, on his death bed, wished to perform a generous act that might outlive him, perhaps giving to a charity or providing an allowance to a schoolmaster to instruct impoverished boys. The finances were left to a group of trustees including the country clergyman, 'a bold, troublesome, over-bearing Creature, always creating Animosities and Divisions; and a common *Barreter* [litigant] in his Country'. By threatening the other trustees, the clergyman 'got the whole to himself, and accordingly made a *Political Use* of it', by employing an ignorant woman to instruct the boys from whom he would then receive an allowance. To inflate his power, 'and because he would be more fashionable and get all he could, no Boy was permitted to receive the Benefit of his Charity, who did not first shake him handsomly by the Palm'.¹¹⁰ Clergymen were officeholders of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., III, p. 491.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 402.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 488.

¹¹⁰ Bolingbroke, *Contributions to the Craftsman*, pp. 97-8.

civil state and their corruption was equally as dangerous for the public good as the craft of the ministerialist. The state endowed clergymen to be spiritual guides and preach the public faith.

In generating a vision of Christian civil religion, Bolingbroke hoped to generate good citizens. A true Christian believer was also a patriot as he placed the interests of this world as the end of his moral life. It has sometimes been supposed that Bolingbroke's deism was wholly anticlerical and that he believed religion, in a Machiavellian sense, was a social and political instrument.¹¹¹ Bolingbroke invoked Machiavelli's name when he discussed the success of the ancient civil religions in forming good citizens. In his *History of England*, Bolingbroke paraphrased Machiavelli's *Discourses* when he discussed how the 'grandeur and felicity' of the Roman republic owed a great deal to the religious settlement of Numa.¹¹² Bolingbroke also praised the ancient 'Egyptian wisdom' in their religious and civil institutions as well as the following 'philosophical legislators': Zoroaster and Zamolxis, Minos, Charondas, Numa, Pythagoras, and Moses. They each instituted the doctrines of revelation and future rewards and punishments over cloudy and credulous peoples. Such doctrines, however superstitious, were 'a proper expedient to enforce obedience to the political regimen'.¹¹³

But Bolingbroke's conception of civil religion was more specifically Christian. It rested on a principled commitment to the precepts of Christian Reform on primitivist principles. This line of argument is so central in relating Bolingbroke's deism with his commitment to the Reformed Christian commonwealth that it is worth dwelling upon it a little further. 'To make government effectual to all the good purposes of it', Bolingbroke wrote in *Concerning authority in matters of religion*, 'there must be a religion'. It must be a national religion with established clergymen, maintained 'in reputation and reverence' so that 'all other religions or sects must be kept too low to become the rivals of it'. A 'religious order subject to the civil magistrate, and subservient to the civil power', was one of the 'first principles of good policy'.¹¹⁴ These were universal truths for all states. But it was 'eminently true of Christianity in particular'. There was 'no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind'.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Dickinson, *Bolingbroke*, pp. 164-5; Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his circle*, p. 104.

¹¹² Bolingbroke, *Works*, I, p. 292.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, III, p. 223.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 108.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, III, p. 396.

Toleration, tests, and rulers

In Bolingbroke's vision, the civil religion of Hanoverian England was the modern Christian perfection of the success of the ancient pagan civil faiths. To be revered, the established faith required the acquiescence even of those who failed to concur with its articles of faith:

Dissenters and freethinkers. They must support the national church by conceding the need for a test act in public office and for regulated public worship in the Christian commonwealth.

By return, the agents of the Church of England would defend inward freedom of conscience by the Protestant commitment to the primitive gospel. Bolingbroke's civil religion was therefore infused with Protestant spiritual individualism. He believed his policy could be pursued 'not only without persecution but without the invasion of any one right which men can justly claim under the freest and most equitable government'.¹¹⁶

It was not simply prudent but also an expression of its Protestantism for the Church of England to tolerate Dissent. In the first letter of the *Dissertation*, he apologised for those, including himself, who had supported harsh treatment of Dissent. 'Experience hath removed prejudice' and 'indulgence hath done what severity never could'.¹¹⁷ In *Concerning matters of authority in religion*, Bolingbroke reminded Pope that the Reformation had unleashed disorder, war, and massacre by 'the several ridiculous and mad sects, to the rise of which this reformation gave occasion'.¹¹⁸ It was neither politic nor legitimate to impose uniformity on sectarians even though they had betrayed natural religion and primitive Christianity by their frenzy. A benevolent, pastoral, and pedagogical established church might teach basic moral precepts in such a way as to prevent the rise of sects. An established church was needed because reason was not 'given to all alike, and being very imperfectly given to those who possess the greatest share, our wisdom and our happiness are very imperfect likewise'.¹¹⁹

There was a comprehensive impulse within Bolingbroke's line of argument. He believed Englishmen were 'now in the true and only road, which can possibly lead to a perfect reconciliation among Protestants'. This road would end in 'the abolition of all their differences; or to terms of difference so little essential, as to deserve none of distinction'. To achieve perfect reconciliation, the principles of the Christian gospel must be followed, above all, 'mutual good will', because these 'happy ends... never can be obtained by force'. To attempt to enforce religious uniformity would prompt a return to the religious trauma of the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., IV, pp. 108-9.

¹¹⁷ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Bolingbroke, *Works*, I, p. 105.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

seventeenth century. Force ‘may support a rivalry and erect even counter-establishments’ and ‘by the same means, our ancient disputes will be revived’ and ‘the Church will be thought really in danger’.¹²⁰ Once all differences among Protestants had been resolved by improvements in Protestant spiritual exploration, it would become possible for the church to reform and comprehend all sincere believers on the grounds of natural religion.

Until that stage, however, Bolingbroke supported the Test Act. Since the established church was a public institution of the civil state, its officeholders must profess the same religion as the state. Human law ‘may and ought to exclude these men from power in the state, kings especially, who profess a private conscience repugnant to the public conscience of the state’. Such individuals could not be allowed to use their power ‘the more to propagate their own schemes of religion, to strengthen their own party and to recommend their particular notions about ecclesiastical government, which cannot be done without manifest danger to the public peace’.¹²¹ Such impositions had been the violent experience of the seventeenth century. The state was justified in maintaining toleration for inward consciences and a test act to preserve its peace and liberty.

A critical reader of Bolingbroke might have recalled his earlier support for the occasional conformity and schism bills. In *A letter to Sir William Wyndham*, Bolingbroke argued that the bills were consistent with the principles of freedom of conscience and Erastian governance of the established church. ‘I verily think that the persecution of dissenters entered into no man’s head’, Bolingbroke explained. Certainly, one motivation was party interest. The Tories hoped that the Whigs’ ‘sting would be taken away’. Although the bills had had partisan objectives, Bolingbroke believed them neither unreasonable nor unjust. The good of society required that ‘no person should be deprived of the protection of the government on account of his opinions in religious matters’, but ‘it does not follow from hence that men ought to be trusted in any degree with the preservation of the establishment, who must, to be consistent with their principles, endeavor the subversion of what is established’. Dissenters still did not profess true religion and no government could ‘connive at the propagating of these prejudices’. The ‘evil effect’ of sectarianism ‘is without remedy, and may therefore deserve indulgence’. But it merited no more.¹²²

Bolingbroke’s tolerant religious establishment rested on a Ciceronian appeal to the common good. The method for resolving religious difference was first to resolve civil

¹²⁰ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Bolingbroke, *Works*, IV, p. 109.

¹²² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 115-16.

disputes. Bolingbroke accused clergyman of every denomination of using superstition as a means to threaten civil peace: 'It is a certain truth, that our religious and civil contests have mutually, and almost alternately, raised and fomented each other.' Bolingbroke also noted how 'Churchmen and Dissenters have sometimes differed, and sometimes thought, or been made to think, that they differed, at least, as much about civil as religious matters'.¹²³

Adapting Cicero in *De amicitia*, Bolingbroke wrote that to feel the same way about the commonwealth was the basis for unity in private and public relations.¹²⁴ He accepted that Dissenters historically sided with whiggism 'and they want no apology for doing so'.

Dissenters supported that party with whose principles they concurred and they never acted as 'a sect, or a faction' that sought to undermine civil authority by pursuing 'an interest distinct from the interest of the whole'. It befitted the Dissenters, Bolingbroke concluded, to support the nation and the Country party 'and their country will owe them all the acknowledgements, which are due from good and grateful citizens of the same commonwealth'.¹²⁵

Just as the Protestant Dissenter must hold the national establishment in due reverence as a sincere member of the Christian commonwealth, so too must the freethinker.

Bolingbroke brought the hierarchical mood of the old tory into the 1730s and 1740s. He wrote in his essays to Pope how, among people 'immersed in ignorance and superstition, there arose in ancient days, as there have since, some men of more genius than the common herd'. These men had 'better means of observing nature themselves, and more leisure for the investigation of truth, and for the improvement of knowledge'.¹²⁶ While the promise of primitive Christianity was the liberty of all consciences, Bolingbroke did not suppose that this promise entailed intellectual equality. Since it was 'much harder to examine and judge, than to take up opinions on trust', 'the greatest part of the world borrows, from others, those [opinions] which they entertain concerning all the affairs of life and death'.¹²⁷

However, the freethinker must maintain a principled commitment to the Protestant church-state relationship in Hanoverian England. It was not simply that it kept the commonality governable. It was also that Christian Reform was the basis on which the elite freethinker could pursue his inward thoughts as securely as the heterodox Anglican or Protestant Dissenter. Bolingbroke clearly believed the articles of the faith of the Church of

¹²³ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Cicero, *De senectute, de amicitia, de divinatione*, p. 145. The passage was taken from *De amicitia*, X.33: 'vel ut de re publica non idem sentitur' (trans. 'the parties to it did not entertain the same political views').

¹²⁵ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 8.

¹²⁶ Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 222.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 182-3.

England were corrupt. But Bolingbroke claimed to Pope that his parson would justifiably admonish him for ‘going through the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual sight’. It would not be justified, ‘like those of your [Catholic] church, to remain in voluntary blindness’. Nor would it be right, ‘like those of ours [Anglican], to let him see for me, though my eyes are open, though my faculties of vision are at least as good as his, and though I have all the objects of sight before my eyes that he has before his’.¹²⁸ The role of the ruler in Hanoverian England was outwardly to observe the remaining superstitions of the Church of England until its articles of faith had been reformed back to primitive Christianity.

This vision was also deeply Ciceronian. Bolingbroke’s *On the spirit of patriotism* (1737) called for the British aristocracy to reform the nation by serving the country in defence of the common good. Addressed to Cornbury, the essay followed Cicero in arguing that service to the nation was the highest duty and that the responsibility to serve inhered in proportion to one’s position in the commonwealth. The greatest responsibility fell to the aristocracy ‘who are born to instruct, to guide, and to preserve’.¹²⁹ Such men understood that ‘the influence of reason is slow and calm, that of passions sudden and violent’.¹³⁰ Patriotic aristocrats supported the godly king in serving the common good in the Christian commonwealth in accordance with the natural order.

Bolingbroke was never willing to publish his philosophical works while alive. He had always believed it was the duty of the aristocratic elite to maintain the peace and stability of civil society. He retained a principled commitment to the Reformed church-state relationship as a means of securing toleration and freedom of conscience for all members of the Christian commonwealth – whether Anglican, freethinker or Dissenter. In a letter to Swift in September 1724, Bolingbroke wrote: ‘the term *Esprit fort*, in English free thinker, is according to my observation, usually apply’d to Men whom I look upon to be the Pests of Society, because their endeavours are directed to loosen the bands of it, & to take at least one curb out of the mouth of that wild Beast Man when it would be well if he was check’d by half a score others.’¹³¹ In his *Letters or essays addressed to Alexander Pope*, Bolingbroke made it clear that he never aimed to undermine the institution of the church. Rather, he wished to purify it. ‘Truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator,

¹²⁸ Ibid., III, p. 376.

¹²⁹ Bolingbroke, *Political writings*, p. 193.

¹³⁰ Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 224.

¹³¹ Bolingbroke to Swift, 12 September 1724, in *Correspondence of Swift*, III, p. 27.

inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, sallies of enthusiasm,' explained Bolingbroke, 'have been blended so long together in our systems of theology, that it may be thought dangerous to separate them; lest by attacking some parts of these systems we should shake the whole.'¹³² In correspondence with the Lord Chancellor, Philip Yorke, earl of Hardwicke, in 1744, Bolingbroke insisted that he had no dispute with 'evangelical religion'.¹³³

Bolingbroke's respect for the possibility of Christian civil religion can be inferred by contrasting his response to Warburton's *Alliance* with that of Rousseau in *The social contract*. Rousseau believed Warburton had mistakenly supposed that 'among us politics and religion have a common object'.¹³⁴ Worse, Warburton wrongheadedly took Christianity, of all the religions, as the 'strongest support' for the body politic. By contrast, Rousseau argued that 'the Christian law is at bottom more harmful than useful to a strong constitution of the State.'¹³⁵ Bolingbroke's problem with Warburton's ecclesiology had been that it had supposed the church ever to have been an independent society with sacerdotal status. Bolingbroke's position was neither that the ends of religion and politics were mutually incompatible nor that Christianity could not form the basis for a state. However, Warburton claimed that Bolingbroke pretended to 'a great regard to religion in general' while taking 'every opportunity of declaiming publicly against that system of religion, or at least against that Church-Establishment, which is received in Britain'.¹³⁶

Such an interpretation of Bolingbroke has done great violence to his religious and ecclesiological thought. It failed to take seriously his public intention to purify rather than shake the entire system of the church. He was critical of those doctrines of artificial theology that he deemed extraneous to true religion, above all the doctrines of the trinity, sacerdotal priesthood, and revelation. Bolingbroke's true religion was a natural religion to be uncovered by the exercise of human reason and which was replicated by primitive Christianity expressed in the gospel. Until the Church of England came to reform its articles of faith back to primitive purity, it was both prudent and essential for gentlemen to respect the remaining superstitions in its articles of faith. Bolingbroke's ecclesiological thought was infused with Christian Reform. He identified the godly prince as the defender of the lay Protestant believer against superstitious priestcraft. He argued that an established church was necessary to

¹³² Bolingbroke, *Works*, III, p. 53.

¹³³ Bolingbroke to Philip Yorke, earl of Hardwicke, 12 November 1744, in *The life and correspondence of Philip Yorke, earl of Hardwicke*, ed. P. C. Yorke, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1913), I, pp. 367-8.

¹³⁴ Rousseau, *Social contract*, p. 72.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹³⁶ Warburton, *View of Lord Bolingbroke's philosophy*, III, p. 56.

institute the plain and simple natural religion of the gospel and prevent laypeople from tripping into turbulent sects. Since primitive Christianity taught only the virtues of moral benevolence, its establishment also proved beneficial to maintaining the peace of the commonwealth. In Bolingbroke's civil religion, the clergy was to be governed using the legal and ecclesiastical framework of the magisterial Reformation, since civil authority enabled the lay Protestant believer to exercise their own rational and spiritual capacities. Their Christianity was civil because true religion was worldly.

Chapter 5

David Hume

True and false religion

It might sound oddly dissonant to hear the name Hume uttered alongside the term ‘civil religion’. A great deal of ink has been spilled in favour of the view that the man once upbraided as ‘the fattest hog of Epicurus’s sty’ and ‘the see-saw sceptic of the remotest North’ looked forward to end of religious belief and, in particular, Christianity.¹ It has even been argued that Hume denied the possibility of a civil religion altogether.² These interpretations rely entirely on Hume’s attacks on religion in general and conclude that he believed all religion could prove only deleterious to human happiness and society. They are also concerned primarily with Hume’s religious identity and whether he qualified as a modern pagan, deist, atheist, agnostic, sceptic or irreligionist in general.³ However, to focus purely on Hume’s inward religion or lack thereof is to miss much of the point. Hume wagged his pen against all the negative features of religion as he understood them: priestcraft, superstition, enthusiasm, intolerance, hypocrisy, bigotry, and civil strife. By analysing what Hume perceived to be wrong with religion, it becomes possible to demonstrate his positive vision for it. He rendered the Churches of England and Scotland as civil religions in their respective contexts against powerful Anglican priests and *jure divino* Presbyterianism. Their ministers were to preach the civil faith of their states.

¹ Major John Cartwright, *American independence* (London, 1775), pp. xii.

² J. B. Schneewind, *The invention of autonomy: a history of modern political philosophy* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 354-5; Beiner, *Civil religion*, pp. 229-36. Frederick G. Whelan, noting Hume’s acquiescence with church establishments, correctly argued that Hume did not endorse a Machiavellian or Rousseauian religion of the *patrie*. But, as this dissertation shows, these were but two strains of civil religion. See Frederick G. Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli: political realism and liberal thought* (Lanham, MD, 2004), pp. 13-14, 155.

³ For Hume as the paragon of Peter Gay’s ‘modern paganism’, see *Enlightenment*, I, pp. 401-19. For Hume as a deist, see J. C. A. Gaskin, ‘Hume’s attenuated deism’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65:2 (1983), 160-73; *Hume’s philosophy of religion*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 219-29. For Hume as an irreligious opponent of all religion, see Donald T. Siebert, *The moral animus of David Hume* (Newark, 1990); Keith Yandell, *Hume’s ‘inexplicable mystery’: his views on religion* (Philadelphia, 1990); Adam Potkay, ‘Hume’s “Supplement to Gulliver”: the medieval volumes of the *History of England*’, *Eighteenth-century life*, 25:2 (2001), 32-46; Mark Webb, ‘The argument of the *Natural history*’, *Hume studies*, 17:2 (1991), p. 141; Terence Penelhum, *Themes in Hume: the self, the will, religion* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 177-260; Paul Russell, *The riddle of Hume’s treatise: skepticism, naturalism, and irreligion* (Oxford, 2008); Thomas Holden, *Spectres of false divinity: Hume’s moral atheism* (Oxford, 2010). For other studies, see Shane Andre, ‘Was Hume an atheist?’, *Hume studies*, 19:1 (1993), 141-66; James Noxon, ‘Hume’s agnosticism’, in *Hume: a collection of critical essays*, ed. V. C. Chappell (New York, 1966), 361-83.

A substantial strand of scholarship has noted Hume's willingness to adjust himself to established religion.⁴ It is common to point to Hume's interest in the civic religions of the ancient pagan world in which religion had a worldly orientation and was governed by priests who were tolerant and content to allow philosophers their intellectual freedom.⁵ Nevertheless, nobody has yet argued that Hume developed a civil religion. A useful point of departure is to borrow the insight of students of the philosophy of religion that Hume distinguished between 'true religion' and 'false religion' and that he did so for more than just tactical reasons.⁶ A note of caution is necessary, since much of this scholarship is concerned with whether Hume meant true religion in a normative sense and how it might relate to his own religious identity. Instead, that which follows is an analysis of the role played by Hume's distinction between true and false religion in his conception of civil religion. To speak here of Hume's idea of true religion is to speak of proper religion. This takes Hume's personal beliefs out of the immediate focus and reveals how ideas of church government played a fundamental role in his conception of political society.

The analysis will begin with Hume's attack on religion and his reasons for it. He objected to the phenomena of superstition, that set of false beliefs fabricated by crafty priests to advance their political and economic interests, and enthusiasm, that fanatical behaviour of the misguided religious believer. He observed the bigotry and hypocrisy of false religionists throughout history and agonised over the destabilising potential of religion when not properly reconciled with the political interests of society. Superstition led to the subversion of secular

⁴ Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics*, pp. 214-16. See, more recently, James A. Harris for the argument that Hume's treatment of religion as the central problem of politics did not mean that he worked for the demise of Christianity in *Hume: an intellectual biography* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 22.

⁵ See Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's philosophy of common life* (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 331; 'Hume's historical conception of liberty', in *Liberty in Hume's History of England*, eds. Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston (Dordrecht, 1990) pp. 142-3; Thomas W. Merrill, *Hume and the politics of the Enlightenment* (New York, 2015), p. 144.

⁶ See Nicholas Capaldi, 'Hume's philosophy of religion: God without ethics', *International journal for the philosophy of religion*, 1:4 (1970), 233-40; Livingston, *Hume's philosophy of common life*, pp. 311-13, 329-34; 'Hume's conception of "true religion"', in *Hume's philosophy of religion: the sixth James Montgomery Hester Seminar*, eds. Antony Flew, Donald Livingston, George I. Mavrodes, and David Fate Norton (Winston-Salem, NC, 1986), 33-73; *Philosophical melancholy and delirium: Hume's pathology of philosophy* (Chicago, 1998), especially p. 76; John Immerwahr, 'Hume's aesthetic theism', *Hume studies*, 22:2 (1996), 225-338; Timothy M. Costelloe, "'In every civilized community': Hume on belief and the demise of religion", *International journal for the philosophy of religion*, 55:3 (2004), 171-85; Lorne Falkenstein, 'Hume on "genuine", "true", and "rational" religion', *Eighteenth century thought*, 4 (2009), 171-201; Willem Lemmens, "'Beyond the calm sunshine of the mind": Hume on religion and morality', *Aufklärung und Kritik*, 37 (2011), 214-50; Don Garrett, 'What's true about Hume's "true religion"', *Journal of Scottish philosophy*, 10:2 (2012), 199-220; Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'Hume's critique and defense of religion', in *Enlightenment and secularism: essays on the mobilization of reason*, ed. Christopher Nadon (Lanham, MD, 2013), 89-101; André C. Willis, *Toward a Humean true religion: genuine theism, moderate hope, practical morality* (University Park, PA, 2014); 'The potential use-value of Hume's "true religion"', *Journal of Scottish philosophy*, 13:1 (2015), 1-15.

relations and enthusiasm was the product of religion improperly regulated. Hume went to such lengths to attack false religion because he understood religious sentiment to be a feature of human nature and he believed true religion was reconcilable with civilised society. Further, he argued that it was an integral part of a flourishing society. To that end, it was essential there should be a church establishment. But the establishment must be reformed. He argued that the history of Christianity since its earliest days had been the history of superstition, priestcraft, and imposture. The victory of corrupt Christianity had been achieved by its establishment under Constantine and the history of the Roman Catholic Church was the history of Christian Reformers resisting such corruption. Since the Reformation, this history had become the history of a church establishment continuing the struggle against superstition while providing a vanguard against enthusiasm.

The Reformation played a crucial role in Hume's analysis of modern politics. It had provided the civil state with the means to control priests and set them in their proper capacity as clergymen. They were to be parochial functionaries and pedagogical teachers of the traditional tales of Christianity as much as they were to be learned men steeped in the disciplines of philology, history, and fine letters. They would elevate the mind to consider, calmly and relying on the mild and moderate passions, the ultimate cause of the universe while appreciating the limits of human understanding. There would be no grandiose truth-claims bolstered with fabricated domains of theological philosophy like metaphysics and scholasticism. True religion would prioritise the knowable morality of common life, which Hume claimed to have systematised using his science of man, over and above unprovable postulations about the life beyond this world. Hume's civil religion would recover the insights of the ancients, prior to the corruptions of post-Nicene Christianity, when philosophers were free and priests tolerant. It would be a modern Ciceronian *religio* stripped of *superstitio*.

The evidence for Hume's civil religion ranges across his correspondence and printed works. Many of his writings on religion, like other subjects, underwent frequent revision and redrafting with the evolution of circumstance, especially his changing relationship with the Scottish clergy. That which follows is not a general exposition of Hume's writings on religion but an analysis of his conception of civil religion within them. The morality that Hume hoped would be instituted by true religionists can be found in his works of moral philosophy. These are his *Treatise of human nature* (1739-40), in which he first laid out his science of man; *An enquiry concerning human understanding* (1748), which restated many positions discussed in the *Treatise*; and *An enquiry concerning the principles of morals*

(1751). His ecclesiological thought can be recovered using his essays on morals, politics, and literature, the first of which appeared in 1742, which were routinely revised until his death in 1776, and his *History of England* (1754-62). His justifications for his conception of the church-state relationship were also laid out in his two works discussing the phenomenon of religion in human nature. First, *The natural history of religion* which was first published as part of *Four dissertations* in 1757 and in which he provided a naturalist history of the causes and nature of religious belief.⁷ Second, the posthumous *Dialogues concerning natural religion* in which Hume recounted a fictionalised debate between three men, Demea, Philo, and Cleanthes, over the nature of God's existence.

Superstition and enthusiasm

Hume's prescription for the church-state relationship can only be understood in light of his analysis of what he believed to have gone wrong with religion. He developed this theme in opening his essay 'Of superstition and enthusiasm' by claiming that '*the corruption of the best things produces the worst*'. Nowhere was this clearer than 'by the pernicious effects of *superstition and enthusiasm*', those 'two species of false religion' and 'corruptions of true religion'.⁸ Historians tend to characterise the essay as an original intervention in the eighteenth-century British debate about the nature of religious belief.⁹ Yet the essay rehearsed similar distinctions drawn between superstition and enthusiasm, as well as the social and political consequences of both phenomena, laid out, among others, by Shaftesbury, whose *Characteristics* Hume had read avidly.¹⁰

Superstition, Hume argued, was a phenomenon that 'steals in gradually and insensibly'. It 'renders men tame and submissive; is acceptable to the magistrate, and seems inoffensive to the people'. It had led to compacts between rulers and priests as during the many centuries between the establishment of Christianity by Constantine and the Protestant Reformation. In superstitious political societies, 'the priest, having firmly established his authority, becomes the tyrant and disturber of human society, by his endless contentions, persecutions, and religious wars'. Priestcraft was the consequence of superstition and, by

⁷ For a recent analysis, see Richard Serjeantson, 'Hume's *Natural history of religion* (1757) and the demise of modern Eusebianism', in *The intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy, 1600-1750*, eds. John Robertson and Sarah Mortimer (Leiden, 2012), 267-95.

⁸ David Hume, 'Of superstition and enthusiasm', in *Essays moral, political, and literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 73.

⁹ Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume: the philosopher as historian*, revised edn (New Haven and London, 2012), p. 66. See also J. G. A. Pocock, 'Superstition and enthusiasm in Gibbon's history of religion', *Eighteenth-century life*, 8:1 (1982), 83-94.

¹⁰ For Hume's engagement with Shaftesbury, see Harris, *Hume*, pp. 44-9, 51-7.

means of spiritual and economic aggrandisement, priests achieved their tyrannical dominance. Their rule was one of intolerance, false beliefs, and persecution. ‘How smoothly’, Hume asked his reader, ‘did the ROMISH church advance in her acquisition of power? But into what dismal convulsions did she throw all EUROPE, in order to maintain it?’¹¹

Hume provided a clear explanation for the source of such superstition in the *Enquiry concerning human understanding*. In Christian society, superstition resulted from the union of philosophy with theology. Priestly imposture represented the dominance of philosophical Christianity in secular politics. The problem was that religionists sought to make normative truth-claims about the origins and operation of the universe which could be proved neither rationally nor empirically. Human reason attempted to reconcile complex phenomena into a series of general causes but ‘as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery’. These ‘ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry’.¹² The attempt to understand them and justify this knowledge with elaborate systems of philosophy had created superstition. Bigotry was the offspring of this kind of philosophy, ‘who, after allying with superstition, separates himself entirely from the interest of his parent, and becomes her most inveterate enemy and persecutor’.¹³

In the ancient world, philosophers had lived in ‘great harmony with the established superstition’ by respecting it outwardly in external worship but engaging inwardly in free thought.¹⁴ Religion enjoyed ‘very little influence on common life’. Men attended the temple and ‘the gods left the rest of their conduct to themselves, and were little pleased or offended with those virtues or vices, which only affected the peace and happiness of human society’. Common life was ‘the business of philosophy alone’. Philosophy regulated ‘men’s ordinary behaviour and deportment’.¹⁵ But the fusion of modern religion with philosophy meant the ‘[s]peculative dogmas of religion’ had become ‘occasions of such furious dispute’.¹⁶ In the modern age, philosophy ‘has no such extensive influence’. It was confined ‘mostly to speculations in the closet; in the same manner, as the ancient religion was limited to sacrifices in the temple’. Its place ‘is now supplied by the modern religion, which inspects our whole

¹¹ Hume, ‘Of superstition and enthusiasm’, p. 77.

¹² David Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1999), p. 112.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ David Hume, *An enquiry concerning the principles of morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1998), pp. 197-8.

¹⁶ Hume, *Human understanding*, p. 188.

conduct, and prescribes an universal rule to our actions, to our words, to our very thoughts and inclinations'.¹⁷

Such philosophical bigotry became most dangerous when shared by the vulgar. Superstition, argued Hume in his *Natural history*, was a 'popular theology'. Its adherents shared a penchant for 'absurdity and contradiction'.¹⁸ They sought to make ideas seem more sacred by rendering them ever more incomprehensible. They denigrated common sense and rational thought in the service of false religion. They created a '*systematical, scholastic*' religion which was more likely to prosper than the '*traditional, mythological religion*' of the ancient world because it wielded an iron-grip over humankind through the idea of an omnipotent and vengeful god represented in an 'immoral and unamiable light'.¹⁹ The monotheism of Christianity had sunk the human mind into 'the lowest submission and abasement'. It represented 'the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities which are acceptable' to God.²⁰ By its metaphysical wrangling, it prioritised God's power over his benevolence. It rendered fear more significant than virtue. It made everyday morality vicious.

The deleterious impact of the union of philosophy and theology was most obvious in Roman Catholic society. The 'ROMAN *christian*, or *catholic* church had spread itself over the civilized world', he explained, 'and had engrossed all the learning of the times'. Its superstition had led to priestcraft and, with it, the subversion of all secular relations. The Roman Catholic Church became 'really one large state within itself', a phrase that recalled the charges of *praemunire* and *imperium in imperio*. Worse, the 'PERIPATETIC philosophy was alone admitted into all the schools, to the utter depravation of every other kind of learning'.²¹ Hume explained the point further in 'Of the Protestant succession'. Roman Catholicism was accompanied with 'its natural attendants of inquisitors, and stakes, and gibbets', making it 'less tolerating' than Protestantism. By failing to divide 'the sacerdotal from the regal office', it was 'prejudicial to any state'.²²

Superstition subverted every natural human instinct as well as misrepresenting the God of Christianity. In the *History of England*, Hume recounted the sack of Jerusalem by the Crusaders who 'put the numerous garrison and inhabitants to the sword without distinction'.

¹⁷ Hume, *Principles of morals*, p. 198.

¹⁸ David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history of religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, 1993), p. 166.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176, 190.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²¹ David Hume, 'Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences', in *Essays*, p. 121.

²² David Hume, 'Of the Protestant succession', in *ibid.*, p. 510.

No 'age or sex was spared' and 'infants on the breast were pierced by the same blow with their mothers, who implored for mercy'. Men who had been promised quarter 'were butchered in cold blood by those ferocious conquerors' and the streets of Jerusalem were 'covered with dead bodies'. Meanwhile 'the triumphant warriors, after every enemy was subdued and slaughtered, immediately turned themselves, with the sentiments of humiliation and contrition, towards the holy sepulchre'. These soldiers wept and sung anthems 'to their Saviour, who had there purchased their salvation by his death and agony'.²³ But they wept no tears for their victims. Here was religion ripped from all moral sentiment. It ignored suffering and subdued sympathy. It placed the approbation of a capricious and vengeful deity over the fellow-feeling of men. Hume developed the idea that false religion subverted human nature in his essay 'Of the standard of taste'. More often than not in works of religious art, Hume explained, the 'same good sense, that directs men in the ordinary occurrences of life, is not hearkened to in religious matters, which are supposed to be placed altogether above the cognizance of human reason'. But '*bigotry and superstition*' so confound 'the sentiments of morality, and alter the boundaries of vice and virtue' to be neither morally agreeable and useful nor enjoyable. Hume singled out the Roman Catholic Church for using art to represent 'violent hatred' and 'divine wrath and vengeance'.²⁴

As well as superstition, Hume reserved ire for the false religion of enthusiasm. Whereas superstition lent itself to priestly power, enthusiasm lent itself to popular power. This had been shown by 'the *anabaptists* in GERMANY, the *camisars* in FRANCE, the *levellers* and other fanatics in ENGLAND, and the *covenanters* in SCOTLAND'. Enthusiasm was 'founded on strong spirits, and a presumptuous boldness of character'. It naturally 'begets the most extreme resolutions', especially 'after it rises to that height as to inspire the deluded fanatic with the opinion of divine illuminations, and with a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality, and prudence'. Enthusiasm produced 'the most cruel disorders in human society'. Yet its fury 'is like that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before'. Once they had exhausted themselves, erstwhile fanatics 'sink into the greatest remissness and coolness in sacred matters'.²⁵ It is reasonable to imagine Hume here casting eighteenth-century society as the calm that had emerged following the enthusiasm of the seventeenth-century wars of religion.

²³ David Hume, *The history of England from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis, 1983), I, p. 250.

²⁴ David Hume, 'Of the standard of taste', in *Essays*, p. 247.

²⁵ Hume, 'Of superstition and enthusiasm', p. 77.

It was also by their political consequences that Hume took such interest in the phenomena of superstition and enthusiasm. Superstition had been the product of the subversion of secular relations and the triumph of the ecclesiastical over the civil power. But enthusiasm was the consequence of religion when removed from all social control. Hume's maxim was that '*superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it*'. Superstition 'groans under the dominion of priests' whereas enthusiasm 'is destructive of all ecclesiastical power'. Enthusiasm, 'being the infirmity of bold and ambitious tempers, is naturally accompanied with a spirit of liberty' whereas superstition, 'on the contrary, renders men tame and abject, and fits them for slavery'.²⁶ These distinctions helped to account for the modern English party system. The leaders of the whigs 'have either been *deists* or profest *latitudinarians* in their principles' so that they were 'friends to toleration, and indifferent to any particular sect of *christians*'. Sectaries, 'who have all a strong tincture of enthusiasm, have always, without exception, concurred with that party, in defence of civil liberty'. Conversely, the 'resemblance in their superstitions long united the high-church *tories*, and the *Roman catholics*, in support of prerogative and kingly power'.²⁷

The final aspect of false religion that pertains to Hume's civil religion was his analysis of its origins in human nature. Superstition and enthusiasm were products of natural passions. The sources of superstition were 'weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance'. The sources of enthusiasm were 'hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance'. Both were products of violent passions. Superstition resulted from the mind of man being 'subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholic disposition, or from the occurrence of all these circumstances'.²⁸ Enthusiasm was the result of the mind of man being 'subject to an unaccountable elevation and presumption, arising from prosperous success, from luxuriant health, from strong spirits, or from a bold and confident disposition'.²⁹ As he explained in the *Natural history*, 'Our natural terrors present the notion of a devilish and malicious deity'. Conversely, our 'propensity to adulation leads us to acknowledge an excellent and divine' one. Men's early image of the deity were built from the passions of hope and fear. Every 'image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice must occur' and augments 'the ghastliness and horror, which

²⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

oppresses the amazed religionist'. A 'panic having once seized the mind, the active fancy still farther multiplies the objects of terror'.³⁰

Religion was, therefore, a product of the passions, especially hope and fear. These passions were not instinctual but the products of the reflection of the mind on the natural order. The 'first religious principles must be secondary', Hume explained at the start of the *Natural history*, 'such as may easily be perverted by various accidents and causes, and whose operation too, in some cases, by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, be altogether prevented'.³¹ The first ideas of religion 'arose not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears which actuate the human mind'.³² Hume's analysis of religion was similar to those of Shaftesbury and Trenchard. All three identified the phenomenon of religion with human passions and, therefore, understood it to be a feature of human nature.³³ Hume argued at the close of the *Natural history* that it was a 'noble privilege' of 'human reason to attain the knowledge of the supreme Being' and, 'from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator'. But the 'religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world' were simply 'sick men's dreams'.³⁴ Hume hoped to construct true religion and the noble privilege that pertained to it on different passions. To do so, he first required the correct ordering of church-state relations.

The church establishment

The means with which to purge false religion from political society were, in Hume's analysis, afforded by the Protestant Reformation. The forms of Reformation that had emerged in England and Scotland were different but their effects were similar. In England, it was a magisterial Reformation that allowed church reformers to begin to purge the corruptions of Roman Catholic priestcraft. The 'acknowledgement of the king's supremacy introduced there a great simplicity in government', Hume explained in the *History of England*, 'by uniting the spiritual with the civil power, and preventing disputes about limits, which never could be exactly determined between the contending jurisdictions'. A way also opened 'for checking the exorbitancies of superstition, and breaking those shackles, by which all human reason,

³⁰ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, pp. 176-7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³³ Harrison also rightly showed that Hume moved away from analyses like those of Shaftesbury and Trenchard by refusing to accept the idea of a natural religion. Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions*, pp. 125-6, 169-72.

³⁴ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, p. 184.

policy, and industry had so long been encumbered'. Due to the royal supremacy, the prince, unlike the Roman pontiff, had no interest in nourishing the 'excessive growth' of the spiritual power and 'except when blinded by his own ignorance or bigotry, would be sure to restrain it within tolerable limits, and prevent its abuses'.³⁵ The result was an effort to reverse the imposture and subversion of secular relations achieved by Roman Catholic superstition.

The union of civil and ecclesiastical power would prevent the rise of superstition because the established clergy would be controlled by the magistrate. Hume made a mischievous but significant reference to the Erastian character of a Reformed clergy in the *Treatise*. Discussing the practice of promising, he observed how 'tis one of the most mysterious and incomprehensible operations that can possibly be imagin'd' and compared it with transubstantiation and holy orders. He added a footnote to clarify that, by these religious doctrines, he meant 'so far, as holy orders are suppos'd to produce the *indelible character*. In other respects they are only a legal qualification'. Hume had no objection to the legal character of holy orders. He objected to sacerdotal priesthoods in which 'a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object, and even of a human creature'. Sacerdotalism and transubstantiation were 'monstrous doctrines' and 'mere priestly innovations'. They had 'no public interest in view'.³⁶

As an historian, Hume was narrating attempts by Christian Reformers to purge superstition. In the *History of England*, he praised the constitution of the Anglo-Saxons because 'the Wittenagemot enacted statutes which regulated the ecclesiastical as well as civil government' and 'those dangerous principles, by which the church is totally severed from the state', were unknown to them.³⁷ Later in the *History*, he inferred from the clash between Henry II and Becket that the 'union of the civil and ecclesiastical power serves extremely, in every civilized government, to the maintenance of peace and order'. It prevented 'those mutual incroachments, which, as there can be no ultimate judge between them, are often attended with the most dangerous consequences'.³⁸ Hume's argument belonged to a commonplace view that the Anglo-Saxon church and laity had been incorporated into the same structures without any autonomy for the ecclesiastical hierarchy.³⁹ Henry II's problem was that the age before him had seen 'the progress of ecclesiastical usurpations' both 'in

³⁵ Hume, *History of England*, III, p. 207.

³⁶ David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2000), pp. 336-7.

³⁷ Hume, *History of England*, I, p. 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³⁹ See R. J. Smith, *The Gothic bequest: medieval institutions in British thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 29-30, 153-4, 178.

England, as well as in other catholic countries', which had not been resisted by the civil magistrate. Matters had now come to a head as a 'sovereign of the greatest abilities was now on the throne' and a 'prelate of the most inflexible and intrepid character was possessed of the primacy'.⁴⁰

In discussing events like the church-state battles of the twelfth century, Hume was tilling the same soil as scholars and historians of Christian Reform. He was locating civil stability in the suppression of the principle of *imperium in imperio*. Much like other students of Christian Reform, Hume combined this analysis with another focused on the ancient civil religions. There is a faint echo in his essay 'Of parties in general' of a standard eighteenth-century civic theme. 'Of all men', he proclaimed, 'that distinguish themselves by memorable achievements, the first place of honour seems due to LEGISLATORS and founders of states, who transmit a system of laws and institutions to secure the peace, happiness, and liberty of future generations'. By the same token, the 'founders of sects and factions' were rightly 'detested and hated'.⁴¹ Although it is easy to imagine the name Numa dancing upon the tip of Hume's pen, Hume did not provide any examples. Instead, he glossed his history of religion as a feature of human nature. Most ancient religions 'arose in the unknown ages of government, when men were as yet barbarous and uninstructed, and the prince, as well as peasant, were disposed to receive, with implicit faith, every pious tale and fiction, which was offered him'. It was convenient that the civil magistrate 'embraced the religion of the people, and entering cordially into the care of sacred matters, naturally acquired an authority in them, and united the ecclesiastical with the civil power'.⁴² Hume endorsed the well-regulated pagan civil religions of the ancient world; they formed a model to which modern Christian societies might aspire.

Nevertheless, the order achieved by the ancient civil religions had been ruptured by the rise of Christianity. The new religion appeared 'while principles directly opposite to it were firmly established in the polite part of the world'. Since the civil magistrate in imperial Rome was unwilling to countenance Christianity, the apparatus of the secular power was not used to restrain the interested diligence of the priests who were 'allowed to engross all the authority in the new sect'.⁴³ Once Christianity became the established religion following the conversion of Constantine, 'the same principles of priestly government' continued and

⁴⁰ Hume, *History of England*, I, pp. 311-12.

⁴¹ David Hume, 'Of parties in general' in *Essays*, p. 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

bequeathed to early Christianity ‘a spirit of persecution, which has ever since been the poison of human society, and the source of the most inveterate factions in every government’. The authority of priests and original separation of civil and ecclesiastical power had contributed to render ‘CHRISTENDOM the scene of religious wars and divisions’.⁴⁴

There was a further significant way in which Christianity had subverted the genius of ancient civil religions. Religions that arose ‘in ages totally ignorant and barbarous’ consisted ‘mostly of traditional tales and fictions, which may be different in every sect, without being contrary to each other’. Even when they were contrary, ‘every one adheres to the tradition of his own sect, without much reasoning or disputation’.⁴⁵ These ancient religions were religions of common sense. They were the products of social conventions and traditions which, over time, provided the scene for social life. These religions were not normative in content. They did not make universalist truth-claims. They were simply the popular superstitions by which people lived to soothe the violent passions – primarily hope and fear – caused by the uncertainty of life.

But Christianity was not like these ancient religions. It had appeared in the world ‘as philosophy was widely spread over the world’ and ‘the teachers of the new sect were obliged to form a system of speculative opinions’. Priests made philosophical claims and generated metaphysical systems. They had to ‘divide, with some accuracy, their articles of faith; and to explain, comment, confute, and defend with all the subtilty of argument and science’.⁴⁶ Thence was generated a keenness to dispute and, as co-religionists disagreed, ‘divisions and heresies’. Such disputes aided the priests in their policy of ‘begetting a mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers’. Religion was no longer a benign feature of human nature which soothed the psychological traumas of life. It no longer served the purposes of civil order. ‘Sects of philosophy’ in the ancient world ‘were more zealous than parties of religion’ because the latter were controlled by the ancient civil religions. But modern religion has produced parties ‘more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition’.⁴⁷

Hume’s line of argument, so far, seems to point towards a Machiavellian or Rousseauian civil religion which praised paganism over Christianity. But, for Hume, the Reformation allowed Christianity to become a modern version of the peaceful union of

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

religion and politics that had prevailed in the ancient pagan world. It allowed priests to be restrained and restored their focus only to the morality of common life. Hume added weight to this argument by analysing the church-state relationship in terms of political economy. This adds further evidence to the importance of this theme within Hume and the Enlightenment more generally.⁴⁸ In the *History of England*, there is a most revealing passage which rewards study in full. Hume called the passage a '*Digression concerning the ecclesiastical state*' and it occasioned an analytical interlude in Hume's history of the sixteenth century.⁴⁹ 'Most of the arts and professions in a state', he began, 'are of such a nature, that, while they promote the interest of society, they are also useful or agreeable to some individuals'. In this instance, the magistrate was wise not to interpose in the profession whose practitioners, 'finding their profits to rise by the favour of their customers, increase, as much as possible, their skill and industry'. Without any 'injudicious tampering', 'the commodity is always sure to be at all time nearly proportioned to the demand'.⁵⁰

But there were other callings 'which, though useful and even necessary in a state, bring no particular advantage or pleasure to any individual' and the civil magistrate must 'alter its conduct with regard to the retainers of those professions'. Practitioners were to be given 'public encouragement in order to their subsistence' and the civil magistrate must 'provide against that negligence' to which those practitioners were subject by various expedients including 'by annexing peculiar honours to the profession, by establishing a long subordination of ranks and a strict dependance'. Examples of such professions included the finances, armies, fleets, and magistracy. Clergymen were another. The encouragement of churchmen could not be safely 'entrusted to the liberality of individuals, who are attached to their doctrines, and who find benefit or consolation from their spiritual ministry and assistance'. Their 'industry and vigilance' would not 'be whetted by such an additional motive' and 'their skill in the profession, as well as their address in governing the minds of the people' would not 'receive daily encrease, from their encreasing practice, study, and attention'. Every 'wise legislator will study to prevent', Hume concluded, 'this interested diligence of the clergy'.⁵¹ Unwise legislators allowed individuals attached to dangerous superstitions to choose which preachers they wished to support and aggravated the interested diligence of the clergy.

⁴⁸ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 256-324.

⁴⁹ Hume, *History of England*, III, p. 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

To this argument, Hume introduced his distinction between true and false religion. In every religion, 'except the true', the interested diligence of the clergy 'is highly pernicious'. Such interested diligence 'has even a natural tendency to pervert the true, by infusing into it a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion'.⁵² Each 'ghostly practitioner' would seek to appear more 'precious and sacred in the eyes of the laity and will inspire them with the most violent abhorrence of all other sects, and continually endeavour, by some novelty, to excite the languid devotion of his audience'. Questions of truth, good morality, and decency would be jettisoned by these practitioners of superstitious craft. Every tenet and doctrine would excite the violent passions, 'the disorderly affections of the human frame'. 'Customers will be drawn to each conventicle by new industry and address' as priests played upon the passionate credulity of the laity. By failing to interpose himself in the interested diligence of the priests, the civil magistrate would discover 'that he has dearly paid for his pretended frugality, in saving a fixed establishment for the priests'. It would be wiser to establish the priests and turn them into 'spiritual guides'. He would 'bribe their indolence, by assigning stated salaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to prevent their flock from straying in quest of new pastures'.⁵³ Some urban centres had become sites of charismatic sermon-gadding preachers competing for audiences. It would be dangerous to allow clergymen to rely on voluntary subscription in this context. The civil magistrate could reconcile religion with the stability of the civil state and the political interests of society by means of public establishment.

By distinguishing between true and false religion, Hume was adding the theme of political economy to the language of Christian Reform. He built on this dualism by engaging in a specific attack on the Roman Catholic Church. Few ecclesiastical establishments 'have been fixed upon a worse foundation than that of the church of Rome' which had been among the 'more hurtful to the peace and happiness of mankind'. Priestly revenues, privileges, immunities, and powers rendered them capable of challenging the civil magistrate and they were able to encroach and usurp secular power. This threatened the correct structure of political power as the 'supreme head of the church was a foreign potentate, guided by interests, always different from those of the community, sometimes contrary to them'. It also reduced inward liberty as the dictates of religious uniformity, rites, and ceremonies meant 'all

⁵² Ibid., pp. 135-6.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 136.

liberty of thought ran a manifest risque of being extinguished' and 'violent persecutions, or what was worse, a stupid and abject credulity' proliferated.⁵⁴

It undermined the progress of commerce and, by it, the arts and refinement in manners. Due to 'the establishment of monasteries, many of the lowest vulgar were taken from the useful arts, and maintained in those receptacles of sloth and ignorance'.⁵⁵ Even though the church 'possessed large revenues', her leaders were 'not contented with her acquisitions' and 'retained a power of practising farther on the ignorance of mankind'. Each priest called upon 'the voluntary oblations of the faithful'. The result was an 'expensive and buthensome establishment' dominated by priests who 'trusted entirely to their own art and invention for attaining a subsistence'. Nevertheless, Hume recognised the advantages brought by the Romish church. During barbarous times, ecclesiastical privileges 'had served as a cheque on the despotism of kings'. The union of all western churches under the pope had 'facilitated the intercourse of nations, and tended to bind all the parts of Europe'. In some degrees, at least, her pomp, opulence, and splendour in outward worship encouraged 'the fine arts, and began to diffuse a general elegance of taste, by uniting it with religion'.⁵⁶ But the failure of the civil magistrate to regulate properly the church's power had rendered those advantages void.

Hume was clearly committed to the church-state relationship bequeathed by the Protestant Reformation. Although Hume concurred with Machiavelli and Rousseau in endorsing the achievements of the ancient pagan civil religions, he nevertheless believed that these achievements could be reconstructed by the primacy of the civil magistrate over modern Christianity. By studying the history of the church-state relationship in the ancient and modern worlds, Hume hoped that the civil magistrate would be able to purge the false religion of superstition by means of a prudent management of the political economy of priestcraft. In these senses, Hume was committed to the general ecclesiological themes of Christian Reform. But, in two key ways, there was something more distinctively Scottish and Presbyterian in Hume's analysis of the union of the civil and ecclesiastical powers.

First, Hume retained an explicit preference for *jure humano* Presbyterian ecclesiology over the Anglican settlement. This was simply because Presbyterian church government, once purged of its *jure divino* pretensions, was more fully Reformed and lent itself better to an Erastian model by removing all sacerdotal power from clerical office. In versions of his

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

essay 'Of superstition and enthusiasm' between 1748 and 1768, Hume claimed that 'Modern Judaism and popery, (especially the latter)' were 'the most unphilosophical and absurd superstitions which have yet been known in the world'. They were 'the most enslaved by their priests'. The Church of England 'may justly be said to retain some mixture of Popish superstition' and 'partakes also, in its original constitution, of a propensity to priestly power and dominion; particularly in the respect it exacts to the sacerdotal character'. Although, 'according to the sentiments of that Church, the prayers of the priest must be accompanied with those of the laity; yet is he the mouth of the congregation, his person is sacred, and without his presence few would think their public devotions, or the sacraments, and other rites, acceptable to the divinity'.⁵⁷

The Presbyterian model was a safer option. In his essay 'Idea of a perfect commonwealth', Hume responded to Harrington's *Oceana* with 'a form of government, to which I cannot, in theory, discover any considerable objection'. This form of government would involve a church-state settlement more Scottish and Presbyterian than English and Anglican. In Oceanic mood, Hume divided Great Britain and Ireland into one hundred counties with each county containing one hundred parishes. There would be no magisterial Reformation and no episcopate. The parish church would be the centre of political activity as, each year, freeholders and householders subject to a property criterion would elect by ballot their county representative.⁵⁸ The county representatives would elect some of their number to a national senate each year. The senate would elect, by an intricate system of balloting, the following magistrates from among their number: 'a protector, who represents the dignity of the commonwealth, and presides in the senate' and 'two secretaries of state'. They would also elect 'a council of state, a council of religion and learning, a council of trade, a council of laws, a council of war, a council of the admiralty, each council consisting of five persons; together with six commissioners of the treasury and a first commissioner'.⁵⁹

The officers of the national church would be officers of the civil state but would not risk the residual priestcraft that Hume believed to distinguish the Anglican model. The parishes in Hume's ideal commonwealth would be governed by 'rectors and ministers' appointed by the magistrates. The 'Presbyterian government is established' and 'the highest ecclesiastical court is an assembly or synod of all the presbyters of the county'. Even within this model, care would be taken to prevent priestly domination. From the ecclesiastical court

⁵⁷ Hume, 'Of superstition and enthusiasm', p. 619.

⁵⁸ David Hume, 'Idea of a perfect commonwealth', in *Essays*, p. 516.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

the magistrate ‘may take any cause... and determine it themselves’ and the magistrate ‘may try, and depose or suspend any presbyter’.⁶⁰ As to ‘the clergy and militia’, the reasons for his prescriptions were obvious: ‘Without the dependence of the clergy on the civil magistrates, and without a militia, it is in vain to think that any free government will ever have security or stability.’⁶¹ In this essay, Hume was engaging in a particular political language not unlike Shaftesbury, Trenchard, and Gordon. His essay was not a manifesto for political reform but was a development of the civic and neo-Harringtonian style.

The second way in which Hume’s civil religion was distinctively Scottish and Presbyterian related to the different histories of the Reformation in England and Scotland. The magisterial variety of England’s Reformation had rendered the idea of the godly prince central for those who sought to defend it. But Hume had little time for the idea. Forbes revealed how Hume can be characterised as a sceptical whig since, while he was supportive of the ‘Glorious Revolution’, he was critical of peculiarly English whig shibboleths like the idea of an ancient constitution.⁶² These, in correspondence, Hume called ‘the plaguy Prejudices of Whiggism’ and he described his essay ‘Of the Protestant succession’ as one penned by ‘a Whig, but a very sceptical one’.⁶³ In contradistinction to English theorists of civil religion, Hume argued that whether ‘the supreme magistrate’ who bestrode the civil and ecclesiastical powers ‘receives the appellation of prince or prelate, is not material’. It was material that the magistrate ‘prevents those gross impostures and bigotted persecutions, which, in all false religions, are the chief foundation of clerical authority’.⁶⁴ It was obvious that supposedly reformed princes could still be bigoted or superstitious. Henry VIII ‘still valued himself maintaining the catholic doctrine’, however much he had altered the ecclesiological structures of the church-state, and he guarded, ‘by fire and sword, the imagined purity of his speculative principles’.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 520.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 525.

⁶² See Forbes, *Hume’s philosophical politics*, pp. 125-92. For a further example of Forbes’s idea of sceptical whiggism with regard to Hume’s criticism of English whig claims that the French crown sought universal monarchy, see John Robertson, ‘Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe: David Hume’s critique of an English whig doctrine’, in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Phillipson and Skinner, 349-73. For Hume’s defence of the Glorious Revolution, see Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Propriety, property, and prudence: David Hume and the defence of the Revolution’, in *Political discourse in early modern Britain*, eds. Phillipson and Skinner, 302-20.

⁶³ David Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 12 March 1763, in *The letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), I, p. 379; Hume to Henry Home, 9 February 1748, *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁴ Hume, *History of England*, I, p. 311.

⁶⁵ Ibid., III, p. 213.

Hume believed progress in English opinion over the course of the eighteenth century was further rendering the idea of the godly prince irrelevant. In his essay 'Whether the British government inclines more to absolute monarchy, or to a republic', he explained that growing anticlericalism since the Revolution had undermined Protestant reverence for godly kingship. There had been 'a sudden and sensible change in the opinion of men within these last fifty years, by the progress of learning and of liberty'. Most people in Britain 'have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority'. The result was that the 'clergy have much lost their credit' and their 'pretensions and doctrines have been ridiculed'. Most pertinently, the 'mere name of *king* commands little respect' and 'to talk of a king as GOD's vicegerent on earth, or to give him any of those magnificent titles, which formerly dazzled mankind, would but excite laughter'.⁶⁶

Instead of godly kingship, Hume's analysis of the management of the church-state relationship was built around the themes of prudence and moderation. These, when displayed by rulers, would balance liberty, which was encouraged by enthusiasm, and authority, which was encouraged by superstition. 'In all governments', he declared at the close of his essay 'Of the origin of government', 'there is a perpetual intestine struggle, open or secret, between AUTHORITY and LIBERTY'. This was a struggle in which neither 'could ever absolutely prevail'.⁶⁷ It was not their godliness that distinguished England's most successful monarchs. In the *History of England*, he remarked that of all the European churches that underwent the Reformation 'no one proceeded with so much reason and moderation as the church of England'. This advantage was partly due to 'the interposition of the civil magistrate in this innovation' and partly 'from the gradual and slow steps, by which the reformation was conducted in that kingdom'. Those who oversaw the Reformation minimised rage and animosity against Roman Catholicism and adapted the Reformed Church of England according to the character of the English people. The 'fabric of the secular hierarchy was maintained entire' while the 'ancient liturgy was preserved, so far as was thought consistent with the new principles'.⁶⁸ Ceremonies that had become venerable through usage were maintained in the name of order. The habits of the clergy were kept and no 'innovation was admitted merely from spite and opposition to the former usage'. The new religion, 'by mitigating the genius of ancient superstition, and rendering it more compatible with the peace

⁶⁶ David Hume, 'Whether the British government inclines more to absolute monarchy, or to a republic', in *Essays*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ David Hume, 'Of civil liberty', in *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Hume, *History of England*, IV, p. 119.

and interests of society', helped to preserve 'that happy medium, which wise men have always sought, and which the people have so seldom been able to maintain'.⁶⁹

Such a prudent and moderate ruler was Elizabeth I. She understood the need to combine a reformed religion with traditional external forms of worship. She realised that it was 'the external appearance, which is the chief circumstance with the people'.⁷⁰ She dealt with the religious character of the people as she found it and maintained a religious settlement suitable to it. She resisted the urge of her more zealous reformers and avoided attempts to remove 'those forms and observances, which, without distracting men of more refined apprehensions, tend, in a very innocent manner, to allure, and amuse, and engage the vulgar'.⁷¹ The history of Stuart kingship was less the history of ungodly princes than imprudent and immoderate ones. The parliaments of Charles I were populated by puritans imbued with 'the rigid tenets of that sect' and led by figures who could not 'enjoy any peace of mind; because obliged to hear prayers offered up to the Divinity, by a priest covered with a white linen vestment'.⁷² The debates of the Commons were characterised by that 'enthusiastic fire, which afterwards set the whole nation in combustion'.⁷³ But Charles was unequal to the challenge with his attachment to royal absolutism and Laudian priests. Hume reserved most venom for Laud who 'acquired so great an ascendant over Charles, and who led him, by the facility of his temper, into a conduct, which proved so fatal to himself and to his kingdoms'.⁷⁴ Laud exalted the relationship between the king and priests and allowed the latter to intrude 'on the royal rights the most incontestible; in order to exalt the hierarchy, and procure to their own order dominion and independence'.⁷⁵ Here was nothing other than priestcraft and the subversion of secular relations.

James II manifestly failed the test of moderate and prudent kingship. His 'refined policy' of trying to play 'one party against another' failed miserably. In offering toleration by prerogative to Protestant Dissent and Roman Catholicism, his 'intentions were so obvious' that nobody believed his commitment to toleration.⁷⁶ His grandfather, James I, had been less obviously imprudent. He attempted 'the same stratagem which was practiced by Minos, Numa, and the most celebrated legislators of antiquity' in attempting to buttress his political

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 122-3.

⁷² Ibid., V, p. 159.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 213.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

⁷⁶ Ibid., VI, p. 482.

authority with theological sanction in the form of divine right. But the times were not suited to this stratagem and James would have done better to maintain ‘the sacred veil, which had hitherto covered the English constitution, and which threw obscurity upon it’ in order to advance royal prerogative.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Hume insisted that stable, civilised, and flourishing society was only possible through the union of civil and ecclesiastical powers. He composed a draft preface for the second volume of the *History of England* which repays quotation in full. The ‘proper office of religion is to reform men’s lives, to purify their hearts, to inforce all moral duties, and to secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate’. In performing ‘these salutary purposes, its operations, tho’ infinitiely valuable, are secret and silent, and seldom come under the cognizance of history’. It was the ‘adulterate species of it alone, which inflames faction, animates sedition, and prompts rebellion’. It ‘distinguishes itself on the open theatre of the world, and is the great source of revolutions and public convulsions’. Due to the dominance of false religion, the historian ‘has scarce occasion to mention any other kind of religion; and he may retain the highest regard for true piety, even while he excuses all the abuses of it’.⁷⁸ The passage was later revised and given to Cleanthes, the defender of natural monotheism in the *Dialogues*, who said to Philo, his interlocutor and the voice of scepticism, that the ‘proper office of religion’ was ‘to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, [and] infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience’. Since ‘its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives’. When it ‘distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition’.⁷⁹

Clergymen not priests

By his own admission, Hume’s observations on the positive role of religion in political society were few and far between. When religion played its role properly, its operation was silent and need attract the attention neither of the politician nor the historian. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct Hume’s conception of religion in civilised society. Hume’s views did not pass unnoticed by some of his Enlightened contemporaries. In his memoirs, Gibbon

⁷⁷ Ibid., V, pp. 93-4.

⁷⁸ Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The life of David Hume*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1980), pp. 306-7. The draft preface can be found in a manuscript held at King’s College, Cambridge, and it was reprinted by Mossner.

⁷⁹ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, p. 122. For the relationship between religion and faction, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Religion and faction in Hume’s moral philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997).

recalled that the French *philosophes* and *Encyclopédistes* could not support Hume's approach to religion. Writing of Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Denis Diderot, Claude Adrien Helvétius, and d'Holbach, Gibbon remembered that 'they laughed at the scepticism of Hume, preached the tenets of atheism with the bigotry of dogmatists, and damned all believers with ridicule and contempt'.⁸⁰ These men wished that Hume would be overtly irreligious. They abhorred his respect for church establishments and would not recognise his distinctions between true religion and its popular, vulgar, and false subversions. They hoped he would write his histories with a view to removing all the props for Christianity. For Helvétius, this was 'le plus beau projet du monde' and for Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, it was 'un des plus importants services rendus à la philosophie'.⁸¹ To Helvétius and the other *philosophes* Hume lacked 'a contempt of all religion' and, Hume recalled, 'they used to laugh at me for my narrow way of thinking'.⁸²

One of the aspects of Hume's civil religion that surely most offended them was his insistence that clergymen could be learned. The proper office of clergymen, as Hume put it in the *Enquiry concerning human understanding*, was to join the 'wise and learned' to provide 'an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion'.⁸³ Their studies in ecclesiastical and profane history, philology, and scripture were to act as the bulwarks against popish superstition and imposture. They would reveal the corruptions that had bedevilled Christianity since its establishment and, in so doing, teach Christianity as a religion of common life. This was more than simple posturing. His support for the idea of learned clergymen was expressed practically in concern for the universities where he campaigned for Moderate clergymen in the Church of Scotland in their effort to generate a civilised religion of politeness and virtue. He took great interest, for instance, in the bid of the erstwhile clergyman Adam Ferguson to achieve the chair of natural philosophy at Edinburgh in 1759.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of my life*, ed. Betty Radice (London, 1984), p. 140. For the reception of Hume in this context, see Michael Malherbe, 'Hume's reception in France', in *The reception of David Hume in Europe*, ed. Peter Jones (London, 2005), 34-97.

⁸¹ Trans. 'the most beautiful project in the world' and 'one of the most important services rendered for philosophy'. See, for Helvétius, John Hill Burton (ed.), *Letters of eminent persons addressed to David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1849), p. 13 and, for Grimm, Laurence L. Bongie, *David Hume: prophet of the counter-revolution* (Oxford, 1965), p. 25.

⁸² Hume to Sir John Pringle, 10 February 1773, in *Letters*, II, p. 274.

⁸³ Hume, *Human understanding*, p. 169.

⁸⁴ See Hume to William Robertson, 29 May 1759, in *New letters of David Hume*, eds. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), pp. 55-8.

Ferguson was 'a Man of Sense, Knowledge, Taste, Elegance & Morals' who would be, Hume explained to his friend Gilbert Elliot, an ideal tutor to the son of John Stuart, earl of Bute.⁸⁵

There was a particularly close bond between Hume and William Robertson. Robertson had feared that Hume's performance on the history of sixteenth-century Britain would outshine his own and asked, in vain, for Hume not to 'write this period'.⁸⁶ Instead, Hume suggested that they read each other's efforts and suggest improvements before publication. Although Robertson would not accede, Hume promised to do his best to publicise Robertson's work. 'All the people whose Friendship or Judgement either of us value are Friends to both', he explained, '& will be pleas'd with the Success of both; as we will be with that of each other.'⁸⁷ In the English context, Hume also struck up positive relations with learned clergymen, including Richard Price, who had sent Hume a copy of his response to Hume's essay 'Of miracles'. Hume contrasted the 'proper Decency and Good Manners' of their relationship with the 'Rancour and Animosity' and the 'illiberal Language' of the antitype of learned ministry, Warburton.⁸⁸

Hume was attempting to generate a sociable religion of virtue, civility, and politeness. His was a cultural project against the superstitious priestliness and traditional Calvinism of the Popular party embodied by the spirit of the Covenanters. Hume associated, to this end, with the Moderate campaigns in the mid-century Church of Scotland.⁸⁹ Hume became joint-secretary of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh. He was a founder-member of the Select Society, alongside Adam Smith, with the likes of Ferguson and John Home. From May 1751, Moderate ministers began to gather prior to the annual assembly of the Church of Scotland. Hume and Smith would attend with Robertson, Ferguson, Alexander Carlyle, John Home, Hugh Blair, Hugh Bannatine, and John Jardine. Carlyle later recorded that Hume 'took much to the company of the younger clergy', by which Carlyle meant the new generation of Moderates, 'not from a wish to bring them over to his opinions, for he never attempted to overturn any man's principles, but they best understood his notions, and could furnish him with literary conversation'. The Popular party, 'the zealots on the opposite side', had been outraged by these friendships.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Hume to Elliot, 9 August 1757, in *Letters*, I, p. 263. Hume had little sympathy for the association between Ferguson and Bute.

⁸⁶ Hume to Robertson, 25 January 1759, in *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁸⁷ Hume to Robertson, 8 February 1759, in *New letters*, p. 46.

⁸⁸ Hume to [Richard Price], 18 March 1767, in *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁸⁹ See Sher, *Church and university*, pp. 60, 65-72, 104, 207, 154-6, 236.

⁹⁰ Alexander Carlyle, *The autobiography of Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, 1722-1805*, new edn, ed. John Hill Burton (London and Edinburgh, 1910), pp. 288-9.

These close bonds within the world of the Scottish Moderates continued throughout Hume's life. In correspondence with Blair, Hume wrote of his 'debt to all my Friends in Letters' especially his 'great & enormous Debts to the Clergy'. Hume praised Robertson's distinction as an historian, Ferguson's 'Piety & Learning', and Blair's skills as a literary critic.⁹¹ Hume's will would single out Blair, Ferguson, and John Home for their friendship.⁹² During Hume's final days, John Home hastened to join him on journeys prescribed by the doctor between London and Bath.⁹³ On one occasion, Hume drafted a review, which he suppressed out of concern that their association with him would undermine the Moderates' reputation, of the clergyman Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1773) in which Hume wrote of 'the *celebrated* Dr. Robertson'. 'It is happy', he continued, 'for the inhabitants of this metropolis, which has naturally a great influence on the country, that the same persons who can make such a figure in profane learning, are entrusted with the guidance of the people in their spiritual concerns.' This spirit was exemplified by Blair who equally combined 'Learning and Piety, Taste and Devotion, Philosophy and Faith'.⁹⁴

Adherents of the Popular party received Hume and the Moderate clergy as allies in a campaign against them. In 1755, the Popular clergyman John Bonar of Cockpen penned *An analysis of the moral and religious sentiments contained in the writings of Sopho, and David Hume, esq.* The essay targeted Sopho, or Kames, and placed him under the banner of infidelity alongside the sceptic Hume in response to his *Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion* (1751). The general assembly of the Church of Scotland resolved unanimously to censure Hume and Kames for impious and immoral conduct.⁹⁵ A vigorous campaign by the Moderates was launched in defence of both men. The Popular party 'intend to give me over to Satan, which they think they have the power of doing', wrote Hume. 'My friends, however, prevailed, and my damnation is postponed for a twelvemonth.' Hume was particularly unimpressed by 'the godly, spiteful, pious, splenetic, charitable, unrelenting, meek, persecuting, Christian, inhuman, peace-making, furious' George Anderson, chaplain to Watson's hospital in Edinburgh.⁹⁶ During the general assembly of 1756, Hume gathered with

⁹¹ Hume to Hugh Blair et al., 6 April 1765, in *Letters*, I, pp. 495-7.

⁹² See Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, pp. 591, 599.

⁹³ See John Home, *A sketch of the character of Mr. Hume and diary of a journey from Morpeth to Bath*, ed. David Fate Norton (Edinburgh, 1976).

⁹⁴ David Hume, 'Review of Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain*', in *David Hume: philosophical historian* eds. David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, 1965), p. 388.

⁹⁵ See Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, p. 343.

⁹⁶ Hume to Allan Ramsay, [June 1755], in *Letters*, I, p. 224.

Robertson, Carlyle, John Home, Jardine, Ferguson, William Wilkie, Elliot, and Patrick Murray, Lord Elbank, to plan their strategy against Anderson and the Popular campaign.⁹⁷

Hume's clergy would not simply be learned. It would also be pastoral and pedagogical. Hume edited his essay 'Of superstition and enthusiasm' several times. But, in the editions spanning the period between 1748 and 1768, he kept a telling footnote which is worth citing in full: 'By *Priests*, I here mean only the pretenders to power and dominion, and to a superior sanctity of character, distinct from virtue and good morals.' These were 'very different from *clergymen*, who are set apart *by the laws*, to the care of sacred matters, and to the conducting our public devotions with greater decency and order'. There was 'no rank of men more to be respected than the latter'.⁹⁸ In the same essay, Hume had cast the phenomena of superstition and enthusiasm as the corruptions of true religion caused by the violent and immoderate passions. The role of the clergy was to appeal to the mild and moderate passions, encouraging sociable sentiments and the operation of sympathy among the laity. They would ground religion in virtue and good morals, teaching the traditional tales of Christianity with the humility to appreciate the limits of human understanding. It was, as Hume explained in the *Natural history*, 'the temperate and moderate' life that could stabilise secular relations. 'Any of the human affections may lead us into the notion of invisible, intelligent power', Hume explained. 'But if we examine our hearts, or observe what passes around us,' he continued, 'we shall find that men are much oftener thrown on their knees by the melancholy than by the agreeable passions'.⁹⁹

There was a strongly Ciceronian dimension within this argument. It was the customary morality of common life that would form the virtues and vices and not the confected moral sentiments of superstition or enthusiasm. In 1776 James Boswell asked the dying Hume whether he had been religious during his childhood days. Hume replied that 'he used to read *The Whole Duty of Man*; that he made an abstract from the catalogue of vices at the end of it, and examined himself by this, leaving out murder and theft and much vices as he had no chance of committing, having no inclination to commit them'.¹⁰⁰ *The whole duty of man* was a standard devotional text in high-church circles partly because it was distinctly anti-Calvinist. It is curious that Hume should have accessed the work.¹⁰¹ In correspondence

⁹⁷ See Carlyle, *Autobiography*, pp. 323-4.

⁹⁸ Hume, 'Of superstition and enthusiasm', p. 619.

⁹⁹ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, pp. 184, 143.

¹⁰⁰ James Boswell, *Boswell in extremes: 1776-1778*, eds. Charles Mc. Weis and Frederick A. Pottle (London, 1971), p. 11.

¹⁰¹ An observation made by Rivers in *Reason, grace, and sentiment*, I, pp. 22-3.

with Francis Hutcheson, Hume explained that he desired ‘to take my catalogue of Virtues from *Cicero’s Offices*, not from the *Whole Duty of Man*’ because Ciceronian virtues carried the legitimation of common life.¹⁰²

Pastorally, clergymen were to teach moral sentiments that were consistent with the natural and artificial virtues systematised by Hume’s science of man. In the *History of England*, Hume repeated the argument first made in ‘Of superstition and enthusiasm’ that enthusiasm represented the violent subversion of the natural moral sentiments, the sympathetic operation of calm passions, which marked human nature. Religious enthusiasm was caused by the ‘melancholy with which the fear of death, torture, and persecution inspires the sectaries’. It held up the false prospect of eternal rewards to overcome ‘the dread of temporal punishments’. The ‘glory of martyrdom stimulates all the more furious zealots, especially the leaders and preachers’. Excited by ‘violent animosity’, men pass naturally ‘from hating the persons of their tyrants, to a more violent abhorrence of their doctrines’. But, Hume concluded, a tolerant church establishment in which clergymen taught the basic precepts of morality meant that ‘mutual hatred relaxes among the sectaries’ and ‘their attachment to their particular modes of religion decays’. The ‘common occupations and pleasures of life succeed to the acrimony of disputation’.¹⁰³

It is worth pursuing this theme further. Clergymen were to teach, explained Hume in the *Natural history*, ‘the manly, steady virtue, which either preserves us from disastrous, melancholy accidents, or teaches us to bear them’. They were to teach devotion in line with sociability, politeness, and civility. They would enable men to control and enjoy ‘such calm sunshine of the mind’ in which the ‘spectres of false divinity never make their appearance’.¹⁰⁴ Warmed under such light, the laity would make moral distinctions based on that which was useful and agreeable. They would not live in abject fear of a vengeful Christian God with his posthumous punishments. The clergy would become the modern Christian inheritors of the practices of the ancient pagan priests exemplified by Cicero. They would acknowledge the popular stories that were the functions of the natural appearance of religious belief. But they would not allow such superstitions to become fused with philosophy. Nor would they allow religion to grow unsocial by threatening the civil state or plunging sincere believers into

¹⁰² Hume to Francis Hutcheson, 17 September 1739, *Letters*, I, p. 34. For the influence of Cicero on Hume, see Peter Jones, *Hume’s sentiments: their Ciceronian and French context* (Edinburgh, 1982); James Moore, ‘Utility and humanity: the quest for the *honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson, and Hume’, *Utilitas*, 14:3 (2002), 365–86; Stuart-Buttle, ‘Classicism, Christianity, and Ciceronian Academic scepticism’, pp. 219–91.

¹⁰³ Hume, *History of England*, III, p. 433.

¹⁰⁴ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, p. 182.

barbarism. Their *religio* would be stripped of *superstitio*. As with the ancient civil religions, it was not the normative truth value of the civil faith that mattered for Hume. Rather, the civil religion needed to be moderate, civilised, and capable of calming superstition and enthusiasm.

This argument can also be read through the lens of political economy. Clergymen must preach that virtue and morality were reconcilable with luxury and commercial society. In his essay ‘Of luxury’, which, after 1760, was renamed ‘Of refinement in the arts’, Hume defended the consumption of luxurious commodities as a practice that provided pleasure and sociability. It generated ‘innocent gratification’ and had further economic benefits as ‘a kind of *storehouse* of labour’. It refined manners and polite society. There was ‘an indissoluble chain’ which related ‘*industry, knowledge, and humanity*’. Calvinist asceticism was in Hume’s sights. Luxury could be a vice when men forgot their duty and virtues like generosity. But ‘no gratification, however sensual, can of itself be esteemed vicious’ not least because the operation of sympathy among humans allowed for moral approbation and disapprobation when luxury faded into vice.¹⁰⁵

Further evidence of pastoral and pedagogical themes can be found within Hume’s engagement with the Moderate Scottish clergy. Early in his career, he encountered William Leechman who would become, from 1744, professor of divinity at Glasgow. In June 1743, Hume critiqued a sermon by Leechman on the nature, reasonableness, and advantages of prayer. Hume explained that he had ‘read Mr Leechman’s Sermon with a great deal of Pleasure, & think it a very good one’. It benefited from ‘a very clear Manly expression’ but Leechman ‘does not consider his Ear enough, nor aim at a Style that may be smooth & harmonious; which, next to Perspicuity is the chief Ornament of Style’. Nevertheless, Hume thought Leechman pushed at the boundaries of true religion by placing such emphasis on prayer. ‘Plato’, Hume explained, ‘says there are three kinds of Atheists. The first who deny a Deity, the second who deny his Providence, the third who assert, that he is influenc’d by Prayers or Sacrifices.’ Leechman belonged in the third category. Hume objected to Leechman’s emphasis on ‘Devotion & Prayer’ and ‘to every thing we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality, & the Assent of the Understanding to the Proposition *that God exists*’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ David Hume, ‘Of refinement in the arts’, in *Essays*, pp. 272, 271–279.

¹⁰⁶ Hume to William Mure, [30 June 1743], in *New letters*, pp. 10–13.

The church establishment must also tolerate Dissent. Uniformity prevented progress and enlightenment. Persecution simply worsened grave enthusiasm and generated civil strife. In his *History of England* Hume rehearsed the arguments in favour of toleration by discussing Cardinal Reginald Pole's campaign against Bishop Stephen Gardiner under Mary I. Hume argued that Pole was a man of 'learning, piety, and humanity'. Although he was 'very sincere in his religious principles', he had been suspect in Rome due to his lenience towards Lutheranism and his 'moderation' by recommending 'a toleration of the heretical tenets'. Pole's defenders believed persecution and 'theological animosity, so fierce and violent', were 'the scandal of all religion'.¹⁰⁷ No enterprise was more unfortunate than that of 'founding persecution upon policy, or endeavouring, for the sake of peace, to settle an entire uniformity of opinion, in questions which, of all others, are least subjected to the criterion of human reason'. Uniformity in belief might 'be owing at first to the stupid ignorance alone and barbarism of the people, who never indulge themselves in any speculation or enquiry' but that provided no expedient for 'banishing for ever all curiosity and all improvement in science and cultivation'. To aspire to the chimera of uniformity would expose people 'to all the abject terrors of superstition' and the magistrate 'to the endless encroachments of ecclesiastics'. It would render 'men so delicate, that they can never endure to hear of opposition; and they will some time pay dearly for that false tranquillity, in which they have been so long indulged'. Once their principles were challenged, they would 'fly out into the most outrageous violence'. Persecution served 'to make men more obstinate in their persuasion, and to increase the number of their proselytes'.¹⁰⁸ It behove clergymen to cast a tolerant pose with religious heterodoxy. But there was another category of dissent with which clergymen needed to engage: the freethinker.

Clergymen and philosophers

Hume's civil religion complemented philosophy. He had gone to great lengths to identify superstition as the beastly product of the union of philosophy with theology. But religion, properly construed, concerned itself with the social relations of common life. It belonged properly to this world and it accepted its intellectual limits. All the 'philosophy, therefore, in the world, and all the religion, which is nothing but a species of philosophy, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and

¹⁰⁷ Hume, *History of England*, III, pp. 430-1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 432-3.

behaviour different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life'.¹⁰⁹ It could not authoritatively make truth-claims about the origins and nature of the universe. If the philosophy of Hume's *Treatise* 'makes no addition to the arguments for religion', he believed he had 'at least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but that everything remains precisely as before'.¹¹⁰ In considering such matters as the possibility of a world after this one, religion strayed into the realm of the speculative, the world of philosophy.

In this vein, Hume joined Rousseau in endorsing Machiavelli's famous condemnation of the other-worldliness of Christianity. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli had argued that 'the peoples of ancient times were greater lovers of liberty than those of our own day'. Even though Christianity 'has shown us truth and the true path', it 'defined the supreme good as humility, abjection, and contempt of worldly things' whereas the ancient civil religions had 'located it in greatness of mind, strength of body, and in all the other things apt to make men the strongest'.¹¹¹ Hume referred to this passage in the *Natural history*. The doctrines of Roman Catholic Christianity with which Machiavelli had been acquainted, Hume concurred, 'which recommend only passive courage and suffering, had subdued the spirit of mankind, and had fitted them for slavery and subjection'. Machiavelli's observation, he continued tellingly, 'would certainly be just, were there not many other circumstances in human society which controul the genius and character of a religion'.¹¹² In the Reformed church-state in Scotland and England that emerged during the decades following Machiavelli's death, it fell to the civil magistrate to determine those circumstances by the regulation of public religion. But Hume transformed the tone of Machiavellian civil religion from a civic defence of martial and active citizens serving the *grandezza* of the expansionary commonwealth into an Enlightened civil religion of politeness and sociability. Above all, argued Hume, 'the most genuine method of serving the divinity is by promoting the happiness of his creatures'.¹¹³

The activity of speculation belonged to philosophy. To flourish, philosophy needed 'entire liberty above all other privileges' in order that 'the free opposition of sentiments and argumentation' would proceed without the interposition of 'any creeds, confessions, or penal statutes'.¹¹⁴ But philosophers must respect religion. In a particularly revealing letter in 1764, Hume wrote of the classical inspiration for philosophical prudence when discussing religious

¹⁰⁹ Hume, *Human understanding*, p. 197.

¹¹⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 164.

¹¹¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, pp. 158-9.

¹¹² Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, p. 164.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹¹⁴ Hume, *Human understanding*, p. 187.

matters. 'It is putting too great a respect on the vulgar, and on their superstitions', he explained to James Edmonstoune, 'to pique one's self on sincerity with regard to them. Did ever one make it a point of honour to speak truth to children or madmen?' Hume continued that Xenophon had endorsed the Pythian oracle when it 'advised every one to worship the gods' for the good of the state. It was required by 'the common duties of society' and 'the ecclesiastical profession only adds a little more to an innocent dissimulation, or rather simulation, without which it is impossible to pass through the world'.¹¹⁵ Religious tales were harmless when they were beliefs by which the commonality could live peacefully. In Ciceronian vein, officers of the state were prudent to entertain these tales because they were features of human nature and belonged to common life.

Hume attempted to live out the prudential and respectful distance between philosophers and clergymen. One such example occurred during the 1750s. In 1757 Hume wrote an open letter in which he defended John Home and his play *Douglas*. Hume noted 'the opposition, which prevails between us, with regard to many of our speculative tenets', since Home was attempting to create a rational version of natural religion based on the primitive gospel. But they both venerated 'liberty of thought' and maintained 'a mutual friendship and regard'.¹¹⁶ Hume planned that the open letter should form the dedication to his *Four dissertations*.¹¹⁷ But, on 20 January 1757, Hume wrote to his publisher that the letter should be removed. He had shown it to some of his friends, 'Men of very good Sense, who were seiz'd with an Apprehension, that it wou'd hurt that Party in the Church, with which he [Home] had always been connected, and wou'd involve him, and them of Consequence, in the Suspicion of Infidelity'.¹¹⁸ In the end Hume decided that his Moderate friends were overreacting and proceeded with publication. A similar example occurred while Hume was writing the *Treatise*. He wrote to Henry Home, the future Lord Kames, and explained that he had purged some thoughts concerning miracles from the text so as not to offend Joseph Butler, bishop of Bristol, when he came to read it. Hume had 'resolved not to be an enthusiast in philosophy, while I was blaming other enthusiasms'.¹¹⁹

However, there was more than simply Ciceronian prudence at stake. First, it is now clear that Hume believed it was to the Protestant Reformation that the philosopher owed his

¹¹⁵ Hume to Colonel James Edmonstoune, [April 1764], in *Letters*, I, p. 439.

¹¹⁶ David Hume, 'To the Reverend Mr. Hume, author of *Douglas*, a tragedy', in Alice Edna Gipson, *John Home: a study of his life and works* (Caldwell, Idaho, [1917]), pp. 88-9.

¹¹⁷ Harris has therefore suggested that Hume intended to advance the Moderate cause by the publication of the *Natural history* and the other essays alongside it. See *Hume*, pp. 355-64.

¹¹⁸ Hume to Andrew Millar, 20 January 1757, in *Letters*, I, pp. 239-40.

¹¹⁹ Hume to Home, 2 December 1737, in *ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

liberty as much as the Christian. Second, Hume saw in philosophy the basis upon which to construct true religion. Opening his essay 'Of suicide', Hume claimed that one 'considerable advantage, that arises from philosophy, consists in the sovereign antidote, which it affords to superstition and false religion'.¹²⁰ In Part XII of the *Dialogues*, the sceptic Philo stated that among his 'unfeigned sentiments' was a 'veneration for true religion'. This stood alongside an 'abhorrence of vulgar superstitions' with its 'pernicious consequences on public affairs'. True religion was of 'the philosophical and rational kind'.¹²¹ Philosophers and clergymen played complementary roles in constructing true religion. They were both agents in the generation of civil religion.

Philosophy chided religion when it made bold and superstitious claims just as religion chided philosophy when it risked tearing asunder the bonds of popular society. Thomas W. Merrill has shown how Hume's philosophical project aimed to inform a polite, reading, gentlemanly culture that could mediate between religion and philosophy.¹²² Hume's polite gentlemen, mild and moderate in their passions and sentiments, would occupy the same world as philosophers. They would remind philosophers of common life and avoid philosophical enthusiasm. During the 1730s at least, Hume was optimistic that in England there were 'many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carry'd their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are very day expos'd to their senses'. These men 'I pretend not to make philosophers', Hume explained. Instead of 'refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou'd communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthly mixture'. They would temper 'those fiery particles' and 'a warm imagination' which take philosophy away from 'common practice and experience'.¹²³ Thus, philosophical culture would seek to exist peacefully within Christian society.

There were Baylean dimensions within this argument. Robertson and James Harris have situated Hume in the context of the challenge set by Bayle that a society of atheists was equally as plausible as a society of idolaters.¹²⁴ Part of Hume's project was to show that it was possible for philosophers to question the nature of the universal cause without disrupting morality and civil order. The Epicurean in the *Enquiry concerning human understanding*

¹²⁰ David Hume, 'Of suicide', in *Essays*, p. 577.

¹²¹ Hume, *Dialogues and Natural history*, pp. 121-2.

¹²² See Merrill, *Hume and the politics of the Enlightenment*, especially pp. 10-16, 22-9.

¹²³ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 177.

¹²⁴ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 256-324; Harris, *Hume*, pp. 230-1. See also Alan Charles Kors, 'The French context of Hume's philosophical theology', *Hume studies*, 21:2 (1995), 221-36.

defended himself in front of the Athenians by stating that he opposed the ‘religious philosophers’ but not ‘the tradition of your forefathers, and doctrine of your priests (in which I willingly acquiesce)’, since ‘philosophical disquisitions’ need not undermine ‘the foundations of society’.¹²⁵ Philosophers need simply realise that ‘men reason not in the same manner’ as they did, ‘but draw many consequences from the belief of a divine Existence, and suppose that the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and bestow rewards on virtue, beyond what appear in the ordinary course of nature’. Those who attacked tales of religion might be capable intellectuals. But they were not ‘good citizens and politicians’ because they ‘free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society, in one respect, more easy and secure’.¹²⁶

It is in the mood provided by Hume, the philosopher, that conclusions may be drawn about Hume, the theorist of civil religion. Sher has warned against treating ‘the brilliant but often idiosyncratic thought of David Hume as if it were the epitome of the age’.¹²⁷ In the field of civil religion in England and Scotland, Hume’s thought was not representative. He was never willing to build the idea of true religion from normative claims in scripture. He never accepted the idea of natural religion inducted by reason and experience to which Scottish Moderates, Anglican latitudinarians, and deists proved amenable. Hume’s civil religion was based upon the morality of virtue, sociability, and moderation inferred from his science of man. His use of the term ‘true religion’, signifying proper religion, involved the learned and pastoral teaching of the tales and traditions that a Ciceronian modern gentleman would respect in outward worship while giving no philosophical quarter to their truth-claims. But to conclude that Hume was a pragmatic defender of the church-state relationship and its role in maintaining civil order and keeping the vulgar governable is to miss much of the point. In Hume’s voluminous writings lay a commitment to the aspiration that Christian morality could be reconciled with civilised and polite society. Aside from the commonplace claim that Hume praised the ancient pagan civil religions, his reliance on the history of Christian Reform provides evidence for Hume’s commitment to a church order built within the civil state. His acceptance of religion as a feature of human nature went beyond a prudent philosopher offering prescriptions for managing religious sentiments. It represented a willingness to engage with Protestant, especially Presbyterian, ecclesiology to purge the false religions of superstition and enthusiasm from political society. Irrespective of his own inward thoughts on

¹²⁵ Hume, *Human understanding*, p. 189.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹²⁷ Sher, *Church and university*, p. 7.

religion, Hume recognised that philosophical freedom and the enlightenment and progress that attended it relied on the legacies of Christian Reform.

Chapter 6

Edward Gibbon

The Church of England and the Antonines

In *Decline and fall* and his other writings, Gibbon's conception of civil religion was as much pagan in focus as Christian. The relationship between properly regulated religious belief and civil order as well as religious corruption and civil disorder underpinned Gibbon's analysis of ancient pagan society, Christian Rome, and modern Europe. He praised the worldliness and patriotism of Roman paganism as well as the moral perfection and spiritual purity of primitive Christianity. But he abjured corrupt religion, both pagan and Christian, and analysed it by distinguishing between superstition and enthusiasm.¹ To purge the world of corrupt religion, Gibbon hoped to regulate public religion through a church establishment. But his ecclesiology went far beyond pragmatic statements of the civil utility of an established faith. He hoped to maintain the status of the Church of England as the civil religion by defending its Articles of Faith. Its clergymen were public officeholders responsible for preaching the revealed faith in the Reformed tradition. Gibbon's Church of England relied on the magisterial Reformation to remove sacerdotal priestliness from society. Clergymen would be learned in techniques of studying scripture, reversing the corruptions that were attached to Christianity during the centuries after Jesus Christ. Clergymen would also become pedagogical and pastoral, preaching a worldly morality based upon gospel Christianity, and providing public worship to undermine enthusiasm.

Traditionally, Gibbon has been associated with the Enlightenment conceived as 'the triumph of human reason' or 'the rise of modern paganism'.² Another strand of scholarship has cast Gibbon as, first, a Christian writer who, second, defended the need for public worship.³ To focus primarily on Gibbon's inward faith is to obscure the role that he believed

¹ Pocock, 'Superstition and enthusiasm'.

² See, for example, Harold L. Bond, *The literary art of Edward Gibbon* (Oxford, 1960), p. 160; Peter Gay described the contribution of Christianity to Gibbon's thought as 'modest and subterranean' in *Enlightenment*, I, p. 326. See also David Jordan, *Gibbon and his Roman empire* (Urbana, 1971), p. 157.

³ Joseph Swain, *Edward Gibbon the historian* (London, 1966), p. 65; Owen Chadwick, 'Gibbon and the church historians', in *Edward Gibbon and the decline and fall of the Roman empire*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, John Clive, and Stephen Graubard (Cambridge, MA, 1977), p. 221; Martin Price, "'The dark and implacable genius of superstition': an aspect of Gibbon's irony", in *Augustan worlds: essays in honour of A. R. Humphreys*, eds. J. C. Hilson, M. M. B. Jones, and J. R. Watson (Leicester, 1978), 241-59; David Dillon Smith, 'Gibbon in church', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 35:3 (1984), 452-63; Paul Turnbull, 'The "supposed infidelity" of Edward Gibbon', *Historical journal*, 25:1 (1982), 23-41; 'Gibbon and Pastor Allamand', *Journal of religious history*, 16:3 (1991), 280-91; 'Gibbon's exchange with Priestley', *British journal for eighteenth-century studies*, 14:2 (1991), 139-58.

religion should play in society. Gibbon remained sceptical of the capacities of the human mind to comprehend the mysteries of the universe. Howsoever imperfect the articles of faith of the Church of England might have been, he did not believe they were perfectible in this world. Even if the elite philosopher or religionist doubted the veracity of the thirty-nine articles, it behoved them to respect the creed not simply as the lawful established religion but also to reinforce the beliefs of the laity, provided they did not endanger the safety and welfare of the civil state. Further, Gibbon believed the intellectual liberty that marked his age was a direct product of the Protestant Reformation and its tendency to purge society of superstitious priestliness and frenzied enthusiasm. To suppose that Gibbon was a modern pagan who sneered ironically at the deluded vulgar from the comfort of his desk is to risk neglecting his belief that Christianity, on primitive principles, could be rendered a modern civil religion by means of the magisterial Reformation.

Pocock has briefly entertained the possibility that Gibbon was constructing a civil religion.⁴ Curiously, Pocock did not pursue the theme in his marathon study of the European contexts for Gibbon.⁵ Nevertheless, Pocock has usefully argued that, by choosing to begin *Decline and fall* with the age of the Roman Antonine emperors, between the raising of Nerva to the principate by the assassins of Domitian in AD 96 and prior to the accession, in AD 161, of Commodus whose misrule led to his strangling in AD 192, Gibbon idealised the religious settlement of that period.⁶ By analysing the decline of paganism, Pocock's Gibbon acted as witness to the end of worldly religion, civic virtue, and patriotism. Thus, the role of religion in stabilising, destroying or reconstituting the fabric of civil society became a central concern of *Decline and fall*.⁷

To understand how Gibbon hoped to construct Christian civil religion, it is necessary to rehearse his admiration for Roman paganism alongside his support for primitive Christianity. In pagan Rome, the 'ancient fabric' of religion created by the legendary second king of Rome, Numa, enjoyed the legitimacy of 'the opinions and habits of eleven hundred years'. Gibbon described a benign and tolerant religion of the state, whose officers served

⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Gibbon and the primitive church', in *History, religion, and culture: British intellectual history, 1750-1950*, eds. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 59-60; 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as civic humanist and philosophical historian', *Daedalus*, 105:3 (1976), p. 153. Peter Ghosh has convincingly argued that, by the 1750s, Gibbon had imbibed a world of natural religion with its associated critique of priestliness. See 'Gibbon's first thoughts: Rome, Christianity and the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, 1758-61', *Journal of Roman studies*, 85 (1995), 148-64.

⁵ Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*.

⁶ Pocock, 'Superstition and enthusiasm', p. 93; 'Gibbon's *Decline and fall* and the world view of the late Enlightenment', in *Virtue, commerce, and history*, pp. 301-2.

⁷ Pocock, 'Superstition and enthusiasm', p. 83.

simultaneously in temporal and spiritual offices. Between the ages of Numa and the Christian emperor, Gratian, whose reign began in 367 AD, thirty years after the death of Constantine, the majesty of priests 'attracted the admiration of the people'. Prior to the establishment of Christianity, the order 'received, from consecrated lands, and the public revenue, an ample stipend, which liberally supported the splendour of the priesthood, and all the expences of the religious worship of the state'.⁸ Even sceptics entertained the superstitions of the plebeians. Notwithstanding 'the fashionable irreligion of the Antonines', both 'the interests of the priests and the credulity of the people were sufficiently respected'.⁹

The pagan establishment remained worldly and civic. The 'service of the altar was not incompatible with the command of armies'. Romans, 'after their consulships and triumphs, aspired to the place of pontiff, or of augur'. The model properly represented the achievement of *religio* without *superstitio*, for 'the seats of Cicero and Pompey were filled, in the fourth century, by the most illustrious members of the senate' while 'the dignity of their birth reflected additional splendour on their sacerdotal character'.¹⁰ The parallel with the eighteenth-century Church of England was obvious. It was not simply crucial that the priesthood should be properly respected by means of establishment. It was essential for those to whom latitude had been extended for philosophical and theological speculation that they revered the established religion irrespective of their inward thoughts about its doctrines.

Gibbon exemplified the strengths of the pagan establishment in the person of the senator, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, who praised it for having 'reduced the world under my laws'. Its rites had 'repelled Hannibal from the city, and the Gauls from the Capitol'. Symmachus criticised the confiscation of church revenues because it risked undermining the externals of worship. Ceremonies might lose 'their force and energy, if they were no longer celebrated at the expence, as well as in the name, of the republic'. Symmachus was a tolerant sceptic who accepted that the 'great and incomprehensible *secret* of the universe' stood beyond human inquiry. Since religious mysteries could not be resolved by reason, they were matters of faith. Where 'reason cannot instruct, custom may be permitted to guide'. Every nation 'seems to consult the dictates of prudence, by a faithful attachment to those rites, and opinions, which have received the sanction of ages'.¹¹

⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, II, p. 73.

⁹ Ibid., I, p. 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., II, p. 73.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 75.

In addition to such men as Symmachus, Gibbon believed the age of the Antonines represented the height of Roman grandeur. If a man 'were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus'.¹² After the age of the Antonines, paganism began to collapse. Philosophers and Roman elites had hitherto respected the superstitions of the commonality and revered the instituted religion by keeping their speculations to themselves. In public, the 'philosophic part of mankind affected to treat with respect and decency the religious institutions of their country'. Their scepticism was private and politic; it simply elevated the faculties of the mind. However, for their more foolish peers, imprudent scepticism became the vogue. The 'fashion of incredulity' passed from the philosopher 'to the man of pleasure or business, from the noble to the plebeian, and from the master to the menial slave who waited at his table, and who eagerly listened to the freedom of his conversation'.¹³ Roman civic religion collapsed through the spread of fashionable scepticism from elite to plebeian.

These might seem to be reflections of the modern pagan. However, Gibbon approved of another ancient model of religion. Prior to the progress of Christian superstition during the centuries following Jesus Christ and the first apostles, Gibbon wrote of 'the pure and perfect simplicity of the Christian model'.¹⁴ The religion propagated by Christ was spiritually simple. It lacked religious mysteries, dogmas, superstition or enthusiasm. It presupposed an equality between religious believers and instituted no ecclesiological hierarchies. Although its focus was the prospect of rewards and punishments in the next world, primitive Christianity respected Rome's laws and church-state relationship. Gibbon admired 'the pure and holy precepts of the Gospel'.¹⁵ In church government, 'the pure and spiritual worship of a Christian congregation' presupposed a fundamental equality among its members.¹⁶ Gibbon praised 'the purity of the Christian religion, the sanctity of its moral precepts, and the innocent as well as austere lives of the greater number of those, who during the first ages embraced the faith of the gospel'. It was a 'benevolent' doctrine and its adherents 'yielded the most passive obedience to the laws, though they declined the active cares of war and

¹² Ibid., I, p. 103.

¹³ Ibid., p. 498.

¹⁴ Ibid., II, p. 92.

¹⁵ Ibid., I, p. 523.

¹⁶ Ibid., II, p. 96.

government'.¹⁷ However, much like Roman paganism, corruption would come to despoil the new religion.

Corrupt Christianity

The ill fate of pagan civic religion had been caused by the spread of fashionable scepticism which undermined reverence for the customary beliefs of Roman society. But Gibbon gave different reasons for the corruption of primitive Christianity. In a standard Protestant argument, Gibbon believed corrupt Christianity had been occasioned by the reduction of the mind from pious contemplation of the universal cause to superstitious idolatry. The imagination 'eagerly embraced such inferior objects of adoration, as were more proportioned to its gross conceptions and imperfect faculties'. The 'sublime and simple theology of the primitive Christians' had been 'gradually corrupted' by the introduction of a 'popular mythology which tended to restore the reign of polytheism'.¹⁸ Gibbon's remark is striking, since it was a commonplace Protestant criticism of Roman Catholicism that its collections of martyrs, saints, and shrines amounted to little more than superstitious polytheism.

Although the demise of paganism, an 'ancient and popular superstition', was a 'singular event in the history of the human mind', it bequeathed a legacy to Christianity.¹⁹ Gibbon invoked the name of Middleton and his *Letter from Rome* (1729) in discussing how Roman emperors and the Christian hierarchy deliberately borrowed pagan rituals and practices to sanctify the new religion following its establishment by Constantine.²⁰ Middleton was a clergyman and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, whose grand tour during the 1720s had occasioned his *Letter from Rome*. In travelling to Rome, Middleton had hoped 'to visit the genuine Remains and venerable Reliques of Pagan Rome' during which time lived 'the greatest Men that ever lived'. He sought amusement 'with the Thoughts of taking a turn in those very Walks where Cicero and his Friend had held *their Philosophical Disputations*, or standing in that very Spot, where he had delivered some of his *famous Orations*'. Instead,

¹⁷ Ibid., I, p. 514.

¹⁸ Ibid., II, pp. 95-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 97, n. 90. For Middleton, see Ted A. Campbell, 'John Wesley and Conyers Middleton on divine intervention in history', *Church history*, 55:1 (1986), 39-49; Robert G. Ingram, "'The weight of historical evidence": Conyers Middleton and the eighteenth-century miracles debates', in *Religion, politics and dissent, 1660-1832: essays in honour of James E. Bradley*, eds. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Farnham, 2010), 85-109; Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'From deism to history: Conyers Middleton', in *History and the Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2010), 71-119; Brian Young, 'Conyers Middleton: the historical consequences of orthodoxy', in *Intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy*, eds. Mortimer and Robertson, p. 241, for the suggestion that Middleton spoke 'the accents of a purified, rationally-grounded and very Protestant discourse of something very like civil religion'.

Middleton encountered those sights linked with St Peter and was forced to spend his 'Time Abroad attending to ridiculous Fictions of this kind'.²¹

Over the course of the *Letter from Rome*, Middleton hoped to expose 'the true Spring and Source of those Impostures, which, under the Name of Religion, have been forged and contrived from Time to Time for no other Purpose, than to oppress the Liberty, as well as engross, the Property of Mankind'.²² In *A free inquiry into the miraculous powers* (1749), Middleton explained that he aspired to 'free the minds of men from an inveterate imposture, which, through a long succession of ages, has disgraced the religion of the Gospel, and tyrannized over the reason and senses of the Christian world'.²³ Part of this project was exposing the corrupt pagan superstitions that had passed to the early church. Pagan rites and worship condemned by primitive Christians as superstitious and profane became the ceremonies and forms of the Roman Catholic Church. Those practices that wise Roman pagans like Seneca and Cicero had seen as mere folly, 'too gross even for *Ægyptian Idolatry* to swallow', had become 'the *principal Part of Worship*' and 'distinguishing *Article of Faith*'.²⁴ This corrupt religion stood in contrast with pure gospel Christianity.

Like Middleton, whose grand tour had occasioned the *Letter*, Gibbon had visited Rome as a youth and imagined the city's ancient past.²⁵ Gibbon described how Christians 'imitated the profane model which they were impatient to destroy'. They were 'insensibly subdued by the arts of their vanquished rivals'. They inherited the 'same uniform original spirit of superstition'. Roman rituals, including 'luminaries, garlands, frankincense, and libations of wine', were taken up. The 'Christian emperors condescended to accept the robe and ensigns, which were appropriated to the office of the supreme pontiff'.²⁶

The infiltration of Roman paganism was not the only source of spiritual corruption. The importation of Greek philosophy had also subverted the pure and simple religion of the gospel. Christian mysteries were increasingly explained by reference to abstruse Platonism as, theologically speaking, Athens and Jerusalem became the same city. Irrelevant and trivial debates over the incarnation and the trinity were 'alike scandalous to the church, alike pernicious to the state' because Christians 'were more solicitous to explore the nature, than to

²¹ Conyers Middleton, *A letter from Rome* (London, 1729), pp. 11-12.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²³ Conyers Middleton, *A free inquiry into the miraculous powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian church, from the earliest ages through several centuries* (London, 1749), p. xxxi.

²⁴ Middleton, *Letter from Rome*, p. 44.

²⁵ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 146.

²⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, II, pp. 97, 86, 73.

practise the laws, of their founder' over these unknowable mysteries.²⁷ The concern with Greek corruption aroused Gibbon's most infamous condemnation of the council of Nicaea when a dispute emerged over the divinity of Christ. He derided 'the furious contests which the differences of a single diphthong excited between the Homooousians and Homoiousians'.²⁸ Heresy had come to depend on one iota as the council favoured *homooousios*, meaning consubstantial, over *homoiousios*, denoting that Christ was of similar substance as God.

Much of Gibbon's ire was reserved for the Athanasian creed. He criticised those Christians, both Roman Catholic and Reformed, who 'freely adopted the theology of the four, or the six first councils' and used the creed to pronounce 'the eternal damnation of all who did not believe the Catholic faith'.²⁹ The irony was that such contention was not necessary for Christian faith. These were Christian mysteries and were unknowable without revelation. Human reason 'by its unassisted strength is incapable of perceiving the mysteries of faith'.³⁰ In any event, such mysteries were not an essential of faith laid out in the gospel. Christ had achieved conversions from among the heathens 'in peace and piety'. But the later spiritual conquerors of the Roman Catholic Church showed that 'the principle of discord was alive in their bosom'.³¹

Corrupt Christianity was also an otherworldly religion. The Roman state had not oriented the focus of primitive Christianity towards secular concerns even though primitive Christians had respected the civil laws of the Roman empire and had not tried to create a separate society. As Christianity grew corrupt, explained Gibbon in *A vindication of some passages in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters* (1779), the problem ran deeper. Prior to the accretion of Roman superstition and Greek philosophy, the 'errors of the primitive Christians' were tactical rather than doctrinal. Primitive Christians imprudently 'exposed themselves to the reproaches of the Pagans', he claimed, 'by their obstinate refusal to take an active part in the civil administration, or military defence of the empire'.³² By contrast, 'the Roman discipline was connected with the national superstition'. A solemn oath of fidelity was yearly given in the name of the gods and the emperor. Public sacrifices were daily performed in the camps.³³ Gibbon glossed the response of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, to pleas like those of Symmachus for the need for religion to strike a worldly pose. Ambrose asked

²⁷ Ibid., p. 932.

²⁸ Ibid., I, p. 787.

²⁹ Ibid., III, p. 436.

³⁰ Ibid., I, p. 498.

³¹ Ibid., II, p. 932.

³² Ibid., III, pp. 1162-3.

³³ Ibid., p. 1166.

‘with some contempt’ why it was considered necessary ‘to introduce an imaginary and invisible power as the cause of those victories, which were sufficiently explained by the valour and discipline of the legions’.³⁴

Mystery and corruption made Christianity ever more otherworldly. Concern with the increasingly complex prospects of rewards and punishments in the next life involved withdrawal from civil life and, worse, asceticism. Gibbon’s Romans mouthed the criticism of Machiavelli that Christianity had left men weak. The pagan Eunapius witnessed the replacement of ‘those deities, who are conceived by the understanding,’ by men who were ‘the meanest and most contemptible slaves’. Monks consecrated tombs ‘as the objects of the veneration of the people’.³⁵ Christians descended to more ridiculous levels of superstition than pagans, as fictions were composed to legitimise sanctified relics, heroes fabricated for martyrdom, and basic standards of reason enervated. Eventually, ‘something was still deemed wanting to the sanctity of a Christian church, till it had been consecrated by some portion of holy relics, which fixed and inflamed the devotion of the faithful’.³⁶

Gibbon condemned the ascetic incivility of Christianity in a classic Protestant criticism of monasticism. Monks abused ‘the rigid precepts of the gospel’. They were ‘inspired by the savage enthusiasm which represented man as a criminal, and God as a tyrant’. Monastic practice relied on the false understanding of man in the earthly city as broken and corrupt.³⁷ Monasticism represented the depths to which barbarism might plunge. Monks destroyed ‘the sensibility of both the mind and body’. A ‘cruel, unfeeling temper has distinguished the monks of every age and country’. They were ‘inflamed by religious hatred; and their merciless zeal has strenuously administered the holy office of the Inquisition’.³⁸ The faculties of the mind and their relationship with nature were now mistrusted and abused as ‘every sensation that is offensive to man, was thought acceptable to God’.³⁹ Platonism had especially provided intellectual props for such corruption. Criticising the hyper-Platonist cult of denial of the physical and sensual based on the idea of the community of goods, Gibbon sardonically observed how a monk denied himself meat but might make a scholastic

³⁴ Ibid., II, p. 76.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 411.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 427-8.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 420.

distinction to enable eating fowl 'as if birds, wild or domestic, had been less profane than the grosser animals of the field'.⁴⁰

However, the otherworldliness of Christianity was not inevitable. The worldliness of its professors became clear in its developing ecclesiastical hierarchies. Although Christians had been 'dead to the business and pleasures of the world', their 'love of action, which could never be entirely distinguished', soon found occupation in 'the government of the church' as a 'separate society, which attacked the established religion of the empire'. This separate society was obliged to adopt 'some form of internal policy'. It appointed 'a sufficient number of ministers, intrusted not only with the spiritual functions, but even with the temporal direction of the Christian commonwealth'.⁴¹ The safety, honour, and aggrandisement of that society 'were productive, even in the most pious minds, of a spirit of patriotism'. Among church governors, the 'ambition of raising themselves or their friends to the honours and offices of the church' was disguised by 'the laudable intention of devoting to the public benefit, which, for that purpose only, it became their duty to solicit'. The 'ecclesiastical governors of the Christians' were instructed 'to unite the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove'. In the 'church as well as in the world', it was the attributes of 'eloquence and firmness' 'knowledge of mankind', and 'dexterity in business' that advanced ecclesiastical governors as they realised 'the turbulent passions of active life'.⁴²

Separate societies and sacerdotal power

The development of Christian hierarchies aroused the latent worldliness among Christians. But their concern with the realities of this life had resulted not in love of the Roman state but in the idea of the church as a separate society distinct from the civil state. This love subverted primitive principles. Gibbon quipped that modern 'hostile disputants' of Rome, Paris, Oxford, and Geneva had alike 'struggled to reduce the primitive and gospel model' to 'their own policy'. The few candid and impartial inquirers, like the German Lutheran ecclesiastical historian Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1693-1755), argued that the apostles 'declined the office of legislation' for earthly church government. The apostles refused 'to exclude the Christians of a future age from the liberty of varying their forms of ecclesiastical government according to the changes of times and circumstances'.⁴³ The apostles recognised that Christ's

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 421. For Gibbon's claim that the primitive Christians, for a time, adopted a Platonist community of goods and sold 'those worldly possessions, which they despised', see *ibid.*, I, pp. 490-1.

⁴¹ Ibid., I, pp. 482-3.

⁴² Ibid., p. 483.

⁴³ Ibid.

kingdom was not of this world and did not hand down *jure divino* authority to future Christian ministers.

Gibbon relied not only on Mosheim but also on Hooker's *Ecclesiastical polity* in describing apostolic ecclesiology. The apostolic model was adopted during the first century in Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Corinth. It was governed by 'faith and charity' and 'Independence and equality'. Primitive Christians had realised the need to regulate public worship. The 'public functions of religion' were 'solely intrusted to the established ministers of the church, the *bishops* and the *presbyters*'. Bishops inspected 'the faith and manners of the Christians who were committed to their pastoral care'. Since 'the most perfect equality of freedom requires the directing hand of a superior magistrate' and 'the order of public deliberations soon introduces the office of a president', primitive Christians instituted an 'honourable and perpetual magistracy'.⁴⁴ The jurisdiction of bishops consisted in maintaining the administration, sacraments, and discipline of the church; superintending religious ceremonies; consecrating ministers; managing the public funds of the church; and judging doctrinal disputes. These powers were exercised according to the advice of a college of presbyters with 'the consent and approbation of the assembly of Christians'. The first bishops were *primus inter pares* and 'the honourable servants of a free people'. Such was 'the mild and equal constitution by which the Christians were governed more than an hundred years after the death of the apostles'.⁴⁵

But this simple system of *jure humano* appointments based on the equality of Christian believers was eventually subverted by a corrupt hierarchy using fabricated *jure divino* claims to authority. Invoking the authority of Mosheim and Ezekiel, Freiherr von Spanheim, the Swiss philologist and theologian, Gibbon noted that the progress of ecclesiastical authority 'gave birth to the memorable distinction of the laity and of the clergy, which had been unknown to the Greeks and Romans'. In its truest appellation, the distinction separated 'the body of the Christian people' from 'the chosen portion that had been set apart for the service of religion'. That portion formed 'a celebrated order of men'. But the Christian hierarchy went much further. The clergy disturbed 'the peace of the infant church' by uniting 'their zeal and activity' with their 'love of power' in order 'to enlarge the limits of the Christian empire'. To secure their ascendancy, they acquired 'the two most efficacious instruments of government': the prospect of 'rewards and punishments'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 484.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 484-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 490.

Soon the 'lofty title of Bishop began to raise itself' even though the 'pious and humble' presbyters who first received the episcopal title 'would probably have rejected, the power and pomp which now encircles the tiara of the Roman pontiff, or the mitre of a German prelate'.⁴⁷ The opportunity for bishops to aggrandise themselves came with the convenience of uniting widespread and diverse Christian communities. As Mosheim had explained, the institution of provincial synods comprising bishops and senior presbyters, observed still by 'a listening multitude', united the 'separate and independent' republics of Christians by canonical decrees into a greater union, 'a great fœderative republic' and a catholic church.⁴⁸ As the councils superseded particular churches in legislative authority, the bishops began to gain 'a much larger share of executive and arbitrary power'. They started 'to attack, with united vigour, the original rights of their clergy and people'.⁴⁹

By the third century, the language of 'command' had replaced that of 'exhortation'. The 'earthly claim to a transitory dominion' of princes and magistrates was overshadowed by the corrupt doctrine of *jure divino* episcopacy. Bishops had become 'the vicegerents of Christ, the successors of the apostles, and the mystic substitutes of the high priest of the Mosaic law'. Their 'exclusive privilege of conferring the sacerdotal character' invaded 'the freedom both of clerical and of popular elections'. Thus were scattered 'the seeds of future usurpations'.⁵⁰ Where the lower clergy and laity resisted episcopal usurpation, 'their patriotism received the ignominious epithets of faction and schism'.⁵¹

Among the bishops, there began a competition for pre-eminence. As the Christian community grew, provincial synods were notable for 'the difference of personal merit and reputation'. Ambitious bishops seized the 'lofty titles of Metropolitans and Primates', and began to usurp power from their episcopal brethren. They affected 'to display, in the most pompous terms, the temporal honours and advantages of the city' over which they presided; 'the numbers and opulence of the Christians who were subject over their pastoral care'; the 'saints and martyrs who had arisen among them'; and 'the purity with which they preserved the tradition of the faith, as it had been transmitted through a series of orthodox bishops from the apostle of the apostolic disciple, to whom the foundation of their church was ascribed'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 484-5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 486-7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 487.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 488.

⁵² Ibid.

Given every other cause ‘of a civil or of an ecclesiastical nature’, it was predictable that the bishop of Rome would come to dominate his episcopal brethren.⁵³ Instead of recalling the church government of the early apostles and primitive Christians at Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth, the bishops of Rome began to assert that Saint Peter had been ‘most eminent among the apostles’, and ‘very prudently claimed the inheritance of whatsoever prerogatives were attributed either to the person or to the office of St. Peter’.⁵⁴ They began to formulate doctrines of excommunication and penance as ‘the most essential part of religion’. It quickly became ‘much less dangerous for the disciples of Christ to neglect the observance of the moral duties, than to despise the censures and authority of their bishops’.⁵⁵ Petrine ‘sacerdotal monarchy’ had become the basis for papal supremacy.⁵⁶ During the ‘ages of ignorance which followed the subversion of the Roman empire in the West’, bishops of Rome ‘extended their dominion over the laity as well as clergy of the Latin church’.⁵⁷

The practice of tithing aided the growth of sacerdotal power and papal dominion. Despite an early flirtation with the Platonist community of goods, primitive Christians had retained ‘their patrimony... legacies and inheritances [and]... separate property by all the lawful means of trade and industry’. In terms of Christian political economy, Gibbon believed primitive Christianity had been compatible with worldly wealth. Of their incomes, Christians voluntarily gave a ‘moderate proportion’ to ‘the ministers of the gospel’. During assemblies, ‘every believer, according to the exigency of the occasion, and the measure of his wealth and piety, presented his voluntary offering for use of the common fund’.⁵⁸ But Christians in and around Rome, the metropole, ‘were possessed of a very considerable wealth’. It was said that ‘vessels of gold and silver were used in their religious worship’ and ‘many among their proselytes had sold their lands and houses to increase the public riches of the sect’. There the pursuit of worldly wellbeing had been destroyed by superstitious idolatry. The children of Christians in Rome ‘found themselves beggars’ because ‘their parents had been saints’.⁵⁹

Across Rome, laws, ‘which were enacted with the same design as our statutes of mortmain’, decreed that no landed property be given to any corporate body. However, Roman senators and emperors, such as Alexander Severus, had waived this prohibition within the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 489.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 496.

⁵⁶ Ibid., III, p. 109.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I, p. 580.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 490-1.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 491.

city of Rome. By the end of the third century, substantial estates had been bestowed upon 'opulent churches' especially in the capital. Having seized control of its apparatus, bishops employed deacons solely 'in the management and distribution of the ecclesiastical revenue'. The 'evangelic perfection' of the early church and all 'moral virtue' were further destroyed.⁶⁰

As the Roman empire collapsed, it bequeathed its corrupt ecclesiastical structure of popes and sacerdotal priests to the medieval world. It was through Pietro Giannone's *Civil history of Naples* (1723), Gibbon recalled in his memoirs, that he 'observed with a critical eye the progress and abuse of sacerdotal power, and the revolutions of Italy in the dark ages'.⁶¹ In Germany, Gibbon argued in his essay, 'Outlines of the history of the world', the popes by the twelfth century 'prevailed against their ancient Sovereigns, the Emperors of Germany'. Henry IV was deprived of his dominions and Henry V, keen to avoid a similar fate, resigned the contested right of investiture in 1121. The 'Fictitious Donation of Constantine, and the Will of Matilda' were asserted by popes against the lower clergy and princes. Gibbon continued this account of papal domination through the war between Frederick I, Barbarossa, and Pope Alexander II.⁶² To Innocent III Gibbon ascribed the loftiest pretensions. Although all Roman pontiffs reserved the title of a 'Universal Monarchy, Temporal and Spiritual; and maintained that all their inferior Powers, Emperors, Kings, Bishops, derived from the Chair of S^t Peter their delegated Authority', Innocent established the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Inquisition.⁶³

Gibbon aligned himself with a mainstream critique of the domination of the bishop of Rome in seventeenth-century English Protestant and French Gallican polemic by emphasising the pope's deposing power against the last Merovingian king, Childeric III (c. 717-c. 754). Gibbon drew on the seventeenth-century French Jansenist Jean de Launoy and the ecclesiastical historians, Antoine Pagi and Noël Alexandre, in writing that the 'feeble' Childeric had overseen chaos and sedition during his reign. But the nobility was bound by an oath of fidelity which made his blood 'pure and sacred'. Pope Zachary acceded to their request to depose Childeric, who, 'a victim of public safety', was 'degraded, shaved, and confined in a monastery for the remainder of his days'.⁶⁴ Pepin, the first of the Carolingians who had conspired with Zachary, gained the throne. The 'mutual obligations of the popes and the Carolingian family' formed 'the important link of ancient and modern, of civil and

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 492-3.

⁶¹ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 201.

⁶² Edward Gibbon, *The English essays of Edward Gibbon*, ed. Patricia Craddock (Oxford, 1972), p. 165.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 176.

⁶⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 110.

ecclesiastical, history'. It was the apex of compacts between tyrannous bishops and their quisling kings. The Carolingians received 'a favourable occasion, a specious title, the wishes of the people, the prayers and intrigues of the clergy'.⁶⁵

The battle against sacerdotal and papal tyranny was yet to be won. While studying in Lausanne as a youth, Gibbon began to engage in the Protestant history of Roman Catholic corruption and medieval Christian Reform. His observations, taken together, form a Foxean impression of celebrating the antecedents of the Reformation. He discussed the rivalry between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair, which had provided one context for the *Defensor pacis* of Marsilius. During the dispute, 'the greater part of the French Clergy remembered that they were subjects as well as Priests' and the crown was, 'in some degree, delivered from a servile dependence on a foreign Prelate'.⁶⁶ He studied the relationship between revenues and power in the early-medieval papacy.⁶⁷ He explored the Guelph-Ghibelline wars.⁶⁸ His early studies opened him to Sarpi, who 'was very favourably disposed for a Reformation in General, tho' he dissaprooved of the violent proceedings of many who bore that name'. In the dispute between the Venetian republic and Paul V during the early seventeenth century, Sarpi 'was well disposed for an entire rupture with the Church of Rome'.⁶⁹ The 'fabric of superstition' that upheld papal supremacy and 'might long have defied the feeble efforts of reason', Gibbon noted in *Decline and fall*, would be assaulted by 'a crowd of daring fanatics, who, from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, assumed the popular character of reformers'. They resisted 'the empire' that the church of Rome had gained 'by fraud'.⁷⁰

The Protestant Reformation represented the first successful attempt to rid Christianity of the superstitious and priestly accretions that had attended it since the rise of episcopal power in the Roman empire. Gibbon's account of the Reformation took place in chapter fifty-four of *Decline and fall* in which he briefly pursued his history of superstition and the church into the medieval period. He first noted 'the strong, though secret, discontent which armed the most pious Christians against the church of Rome'. Reformers confronted a 'despotic, oppressive, and odious' Roman Catholic hierarchy whose innovations had been 'rapid and scandalous'. The 'fearless enthusiasts' of the early Reformation brought to the ground 'the

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁶ Gibbon, *English essays*, pp. 183.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, I, p. 580.

lofty fabric of superstition, from the abuse of indulgences to the intercession of the Virgin'. Those who might have been condemned to the monasteries and nunneries 'were restored to the liberty and labours of social life'. The hierarchy of saints, angels, and deities were 'stripped of their temporal power, and reduced to the enjoyment of celestial happiness'. Images and relics were removed and the 'credulity of the people' was no longer fed by miracles and visions.⁷¹

It was ironic that Gibbon argued that a Christian sect, known as the Paulicians, which had originated in the seventh century and whose dualism and Manicheanism relied on neo-Platonist theology, had led the opposition to ecclesiastical formalism. The success of the Paulicians during the eleventh and twelfth centuries provided the genesis of the Reformation. In 'the state, in the church, and even in the cloister', wrote Gibbon, 'a latent succession was preserved of the disciples of St. Paul; who protested against the tyranny of Rome, embraced the Bible as a rule of faith, and purified their creed from all the visions of the Gnostic theology'. The next group of church reformers was better known: 'The struggles of Wickliff in England, of Huss in Bohemia, were premature and ineffectual; but the names of Zuinglius, Luther, and Calvin, are pronounced with gratitude as the deliverers of nations.'⁷²

The modern Antonines

Gibbon's fleeting mention of the sixteenth-century Reformers allows attention to turn from the general theme of Christian Reform to the Church of England. Gibbon revered the magisterial Reformation that had prevailed since the 1530s as the godly prince subjected the church to a state establishment. Discussing the first volume of William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the laws of England* (1765-9), Gibbon provided a whiggish account of the contract between ruler and people. The duties of the king, 'implied by the original contract', had been 'more precisely laid out at the Revolution, and expressed in the Coronation Oath'. These duties including governing according to the law, executing justice with mercy, and maintaining the established religion.⁷³ Gibbon composed a summary of the constitution in church and state in magisterial terms. The monarch was 'supreme Head of the Church of England; which title is vested in him since the reign of Henry viii'. In this capacity, 'he convenes and dissolves Synods; rejects or confirms their constitutions, appoints Bishops and other dignitaries, and receives in his Court of Chancery appeals from all Ecclesiastical

⁷¹ Ibid., III, p. 434.

⁷² Ibid., p. 436.

⁷³ Gibbon, *English essays*, p. 69.

Courts'.⁷⁴ The king rightly received clerical first fruits and tenths 'which were formerly paid to the Pope'.⁷⁵

Having established that 'the Ecclesiastical order is now very properly subjected to the Civil', Gibbon rehearsed how bishops were appointed. Although 'there is indeed the shadow of an election still left', it had been 'reduced to nothing by the... powers of the crown'. Royal permission was needed to enable the chapter to proceed to election; it was always accompanied with a recommendation; no bishop may be 'consecrated without letters patent, directed to the Archbishop &c.'; and the bishop must 'receive his temporalities from the King; who by his election acquires a right of presenting, to whatever benefices, his was in possession of'. The king also regulated 'the most numerous part of the Clergy', among whom 'certainly the most useful are the parish priests'. They were divided into rectors or parsons and vicars. The rectors and parsons represented 'the *person* of the Church, and have a property for their lives in the parsonage tithes, glebe and all other dues'. The latter were only 'perpetual curates, with a regular stipend, usually consisting of certain small tithes and a portion of the glebe; whilst the benefice it is annexed to the patron of the living, who becomes properly the Parson or Spiritual corporation'.⁷⁶

The language of the godly Christian *imperator* in the magisterial Reformation represented the modern Christian equivalent of the Numean settlement. While explaining the system of pagan worship established by Numa in *Decline and fall*, Gibbon recalled how 'the KING of the SACRIFICES represented the person of Numa, and of his successors, in the religious functions, which could be performed only by royal hands'. Gibbon here performed an important move by couching the standard language of Reformed godly kingship upon classical assumptions. Gibbon went on to explain that 'the authority, which the Roman priests had formerly obtained in the counsels of the republic, was gradually abolished by the establishment of the monarchy, and the removal of the seat of empire'. However, 'the dignity of their sacred character was still protected by the laws and manners of their country; and they still continued, more especially the college of pontiffs, to exercise in the capital, and sometimes in the provinces, the rights of their ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction'.⁷⁷ Gibbon's ancient sources for his account of the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy were Cicero, Livy, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Among the moderns stood Louis de Beaufort and 'the work of an

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, II, p. 72.

English Whig, as well as a Roman antiquary': Moyle and his *Essay upon the constitution of the Roman government*.⁷⁸

In the ancient and modern worlds, Gibbon supported an established public worship. He also envisioned a positive role for its clergymen. Their most important role was to be learned inquisitors of scripture, purging its superstitious appendages. They were to treat the 'scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history' to 'enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church'. Clergymen were to be like Mosheim and Spanheim. They were to be trained in the philological and historical arts. As theologians, they might 'indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity'. But, as historians, they must 'discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption, which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings'.⁷⁹ Learned clergymen served the ends of religion, since the 'extravagant tales' of superstitious Christianity debased 'the reason, the faith and the morals of the Christians', vitiated 'the faculties of the mind', and extinguished 'the hostile light of philosophy and science'.⁸⁰

Gibbon's insistence that clergymen should be learned implied concern about the universities. The traveller who visited Oxford or Cambridge would be 'surprised and edified by the apparent order and tranquillity that prevail in the seats of the English muses'. The square cap and black gown were 'adapted to the civil and even clerical profession'; the 'degrees of learning and of age are externally distinguished'; and the fixed hours of the hall and chapel 'represent the discipline of a regular, and, as it were, a religious community'.⁸¹ Gibbon praised Robert Lowth, bishop of Oxford, before London, and professor of poetry at Oxford, 'whose taste and erudition must reflect on the society in which they were formed' to paint the ideal of academic life. Lowth, claimed Gibbon, had benefited from 'a well-regulated course of useful discipline and studies, and in the agreeable and improving commerce of gentlemen and of scholars'. His studies had drawn no distinction between worldliness and scholarship. The atmosphere in which he studied was notable for 'emulation without envy, ambition without jealousy, contention without animosity'. There was a 'liberal pursuit of knowledge' and 'genuine freedom of thought'. He breathed the same air as 'the HOOKERS, the CHILLINGWORTHS, and the LOCKES'. He followed their 'benevolence and humanity'; their

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 72, n. 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., I, p. 446.

⁸⁰ Ibid., II, p. 428.

⁸¹ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 77.

‘vast genius and comprehensive knowledge’. They ‘always treated their adversaries with civility and respect’ and they made ‘candour, moderation, and liberal judgement as much the rule and law as the subject of their discourse’.⁸²

Due, perhaps, to his own experience at Oxford, Gibbon could not share such a vision. He applauded ‘the filial piety’ displayed by Lowth even though it was ‘impossible for me to imitate’. As much as Oxford would ‘cheerfully renounce me for a son’, he was ‘willing to disclaim her for a mother’.⁸³ At Magdalen College Gibbon had converted to Roman Catholicism.⁸⁴ Later in life, he partly blamed the Fellowship for its laxity in attending to his education. Instead of acting as an ‘ecclesiastical school’ that inculcated ‘orthodox principles of religion’, Gibbon claimed that he had been left to grope his ‘way to the chapel and communion-table’. Uninstructed, his blindness and idleness ‘urged me to advance without armour into the dangerous mazes of controversy and at the age of sixteen I bewildered myself into the errors of the Church of Rome’.⁸⁵ Possessed of ‘skilful and diligent professors’, he might have risen from ‘translations to originals, from the Latin to the Greek classics, from dead languages to living science’.⁸⁶ The shelves of the library at Magdalen had groaned ‘under the weight of Benedictine folios, of the editions of the fathers and the collections of the Middle Ages’. He likened the fellows of the college to monks and, in the tradition of civic political economy, criticised how their other-worldliness led to idleness. Having ‘supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder’ the days of the fellows were filled ‘by a series of uniform employments’ in the chapel, hall, coffee-house, and common room until ‘they retired, weary and self-satisfied, to a long slumber’.⁸⁷

The universities also remained vulnerable to scholastic backsliding. They had been founded during ‘a dark age of false and barbarous science’, and remained ‘tainted with the vices of their origin’. Their early function had been the education of priests and monks. Their government remained in clerical hands, ‘an order of men whose manners are remote from the present world, and whose eyes are dazzled by the light of philosophy’. Their legal incorporation by papal and royal charters had granted them a monopoly in public education. Even by the eighteenth century, these ‘venerable bodies are sufficiently old to partake of all the prejudices and infirmities of the age’. Gibbon doubted whether ‘any reformation will be a

⁸² Ibid., p. 78.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

voluntary act' and 'so deeply are they rooted in law and prejudice that even the omnipotence of Parliament would shrink from an enquiry into the state and abuses' of the universities.⁸⁸

Reform was possible at the level of the colleges. Gibbon praised William Markham, bishop of Gloucester, for improving the scholarly regimen at Christ Church by introducing a new course of classical and philosophical studies.⁸⁹ Recalling the language of political economy, Gibbon drew an analogy between the awarding of academic degrees and 'mechanic operations' by which apprentices gained a licence 'to practise his trade and mystery'. Academic distinction should celebrate 'manly and successful study' instead of pettifogging in the 'mysterious faculty of theology' in which 'the cloak of reason sits awkwardly on our fashionable divines'.⁹⁰

Priestly superstition was not the only threat to civil religion. Enthusiasm was another form of corrupt religion against which the Church of England must stand guard. In Gibbon's own time, the spectre of enthusiasm reared its head during the Gordon riots, an anti-Catholic protest against the Papists Act (1778) for Catholic relief, in which 'forty thousand Puritans such as they might be in the time of Cromwell have started out of their graces'.⁹¹ If Gibbon's understanding of enthusiasm harked back to the religious tumult of the Interregnum, his vision for clerical preaching recalled the plain style of the Restoration. Preaching should avoid all the 'prejudices and passions' of polemic divinity. Injunctions should aver the 'irrevocable obligation, to maintain and propagate his religious opinions' for 'the force of reason and eloquence'.⁹² Much can be inferred about Gibbon's ideal parish clergy from his life as a gentleman in Buriton, Hampshire, where he regularly attended sermons. His custom, following the Lord's Prayer and psalm, was to refer to the sermon using his own edition of the Greek Bible. 'This method', he recorded in his journal in August 1762, 'I find both useful and agreeable and intend to keep it up whenever I go to church.'⁹³ His journal reveals further comments on the performance of parochial clergymen. The Reverend Barton's exposition, Gibbon recorded on 18 July 1762, was 'good but too full of comparisons'.⁹⁴

Gibbon approved most of gospel preaching that aimed to reinforce moral duty by appeals to reason. Referring to the sermons of Dr John Foster, on 1 September 1763, Gibbon

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

⁹¹ Gibbon to Dorothea Gibbon, Thursday 8 June 1780, in *The letters of Edward Gibbon*, ed. J. E. Norton, 3 vols. (London, 1956), II, p. 243.

⁹² Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, I, p. 875.

⁹³ Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon's journal to January 28th. 1763*, ed. D. M. Low (London, 1929), p. 94. See also pp. 106, 110, 179.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 98.

commented: ‘Quel miracle. Un Theologien qui prefère la raison à la fois, et qui est plus effrayé du vice que de l’hérésie.’⁹⁵ While sojourning at Lausanne at the behest of his father following his ejection from Magdalen, Gibbon regularly attended sermons. One particular ceremonial sermon, the presentation of the *bailif* at the cathedral, presented Gibbon with another exemplar. On 1 December 1763, the minister Polier de Bottens preached of the duties of a ruler and people, and discussed the rights of free men. Bottens displayed ‘les talens d’un Orateur et les sentiments d’un Citoyen’. He knew how to speak of the duties of the sovereign and people as well as the willingness of free men to serve ‘un prince et non point un tyran’. His sermon was replete with ‘dignité, d’onction et de force’.⁹⁶ While staying in Paris in 1763, Gibbon heard the antitype of pastoral preaching. On 22 February, Gibbon listened to Jean François Copel, known as the ‘Père Elysée’, whose style had earned the approbation of Diderot. Copel’s subject had been the uncertainty and inefficacy of giving penitence on the deathbed. Gibbon was most unimpressed to hear Copel cast God not as ‘Père commun de toute la nature’ but rather as ‘Juge severe’ and ‘maitre impitoyable’. Preaching the anger and vengeance of God showed that Copel had ‘beaucoup plus d’imagination que d’ame’.⁹⁷

Sermons should be plain and easily understood in motivating the basic morality of the gospel. It should inculcate the social virtues. Pomp and pageantry would not move Christian hearts. In one entry of his journal in August 1762, Gibbon wondered whether ‘the philosophic method’ of the English preacher was preferable to ‘the Rhetoric of the French preachers’. The English method was certainly safer since it was ‘difficult for a man to make himself ridiculous, who proposes only to deliver plain sense on a subject he has thoroughly studied’. But the English method risked slipping into ‘the least pretensions towards the sublime, or the pathetic’ that the listener must ‘admire or laugh’. People in general were ‘so well acquainted with our duty, that it is almost superfluous to convince us of it’. It was not the head ‘that holds out’ but the heart and, ‘by a moving eloquence’, it was possible ‘to rouse the sleeping sentiments of the heart, & incite it to acts of virtue’. By a regular attendance of sermons in which eloquence and plain sense were deployed, clergymen might inculcate the habit of virtue and performance of good works.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Trans. ‘What a miracle. A theologian who prefers reason to faith, and who is more frightened of vice than heresy.’ Edward Gibbon, *Le journal de Gibbon à Lausanne, 17 août 1763-19 avril 1764*, ed. Georges Bonnard (Lausanne, 1945), p. 20, n. 3.

⁹⁶ Trans. ‘the talents of an orator and the sentiments of a citizen... a prince and certainly not a tyrant... dignity, unction and strength’. Ibid., p. 161.

⁹⁷ Trans. ‘a common father of all nature... a severe judge... a ruthless master... much more imagination than spirit’. Edward Gibbon, *Miscellanea Gibboniana*, eds. G. R. de Beer, Georges Bonnard, and Louis Jounod (Lausanne, 1952), pp. 96-7.

⁹⁸ Low (ed.), *Gibbon’s journal*, pp. 126-7.

Toleration and gentlemen

A further aspect of the benign and pastoral orientation of the public religion was its commitment to toleration. Gibbon identified the history of tolerant Reformed Christianity firmly with Erasmianism. Since the days of Luther and Calvin, he explained in *Decline and fall*, 'a secret reformation has been silently working in the bosom of the reformed churches' as 'the disciples of Erasmus diffused a spirit of freedom and moderation'. While Erasmus was 'the father of rational theology', Erasmianism was carried forth by the Dutch Arminians, Hugo Grotius, Philipp van Limborch, and Jean Le Clerc. Gibbon lauded Limborch as 'moderate and judicious' for his Erasmian claim that 'any speculative truths were dearly purchased at the expence of practical virtue and publick peace'.⁹⁹ In England, he praised the rational theology of Chillingworth as well as 'the latitudinarians of Cambridge': Tillotson, Clarke, and Hoadly.¹⁰⁰ Although liberty of conscience 'has been claimed as a common benefit, an inalienable right', it was 'the free governments of Holland and England' that had instituted 'the practice of toleration'.¹⁰¹

Gibbon relied especially on Chillingworth and Bayle, both of whom had also youthfully converted to Roman Catholicism only to re-join the Reformed fold. Chillingworth 'unravelled his mistakes, and delivered his mind from the yoke of authority and superstition'. He developed the creed that scripture was the true religion and private reason the sole interpreter for Protestants.¹⁰² Had Bayle decided to remain within the Roman Catholic Church and join the ecclesiastical profession, 'the genius and favour of such a proselyte might have aspired to wealth and honours'. Yet, 'the hypocrite would have found less happiness in the comforts of a benefice or the dignity of a mitre than he enjoyed at Rotterdam, in a private state of exile, indigence and freedom'.¹⁰³ Praising the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) as 'a vast repository of facts and opinions', Gibbon characterised Bayle as balancing the false religions 'in his sceptical scales'.¹⁰⁴ The 'philosopher of Rotterdam' condemned equally the persecution of Louis XIV as well as the 'republican maxims of the Calvinists, their vain prophecies, and the intolerant bigotry'.¹⁰⁵

Truly reformed churches were tolerant because they realised that their articles of faith were not perfectible. Their doctrines stood beyond the reach of human intellect and were

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 87, 148-9.

¹⁰⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 438 and n. 38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 438-9.

¹⁰² Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 90.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

matters of faith. Most radically, Gibbon believed the trinity was a matter of faith. The only scriptural justification for the doctrine, in 1 John 5.7, was ‘condemned by the orthodox fathers, ancient versions, and authentic manuscripts’.¹⁰⁶ A related matter of faith was the divinity of Christ. Gibbon explained that Apollonius of Tyana, the Greek Pythagorean, had been born around the same time as Jesus Christ. Yet the former’s life ‘is related in so fabulous a manner by his disciples, that we are at a loss to discover whether he was a sage, an impostor, or a fanatic’.¹⁰⁷ The elevation of Christ to the level of a deity began in the Pauline epistles and church councils fraudulently misinterpreted the meaning of the term, ‘God was manifested in the flesh’, by replacing the word ‘God’ for the word ‘who’. Yet the original reading was retained in the Latin and Syriac versions of the Bible while the reasoning remained in the Greek version and in the logic of the Latin fathers.¹⁰⁸

It might be objected that, by these lines of argument, Gibbon was emptying civil religion of any discernibly Christian content. Of the early Reformers, Gibbon wrote that the philosopher ‘who calculates the degree of their merit and the value of their reformation will prudently ask from what articles of faith, *above* or *against* our reason, they have enfranchised the Christians’. Such an enfranchisement ‘is doubtless a benefit so far as it may be compatible with truth and piety’. The philosopher would conclude that ‘we shall rather be surprised by the timidity, than scandalised by the freedom of our first reformers’.¹⁰⁹ The early Reformers kept the doctrines of original sin, redemption, grace, and predestination which ‘have been strained from the epistles of St. Paul’ and ‘prepared by the fathers and schoolmen’.¹¹⁰ In a footnote, Gibbon noted that under Edward VI ‘our reformation was more bold and perfect’ but still bemoaned how ‘in the fundamental articles of the church of England, a strong and explicit declaration against the real presence was obliterated in the original copy, to please the people, or the Lutherans, or Queen Elizabeth’.¹¹¹

However, to object that Gibbon was rushing to de-Christianise civil religion is to neglect Gibbon’s insistence that the mysteries of Christianity were matters of faith beyond human reason. Further, as he had argued with regard to Roman paganism, Gibbon believed that custom sufficed in those areas left dark by human reason. As Young has shown, Gibbon

¹⁰⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, II, pp. 441-2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, I, p. 315, n. 63.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 940.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 436.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, n. 33.

opposed those which he took to be the tenets of freethinkers and atheists.¹¹² He could not ‘approve the intolerant zeal of the philosophers and Encyclopaedists the friends of d’Olbach and Helvetius’.¹¹³ Irrespective of Gibbon’s inward thought about the normative truths of Christianity, he believed reverence for the established religion of Hanoverian Britain was a crucial expression of citizenship within it. In a section that was never included in his memoirs, Gibbon thus recalled his activities at his parish church. After his library, ‘I must not forget an occasional place of weekly study: the parish Church which I frequented, commonly twice, every Sunday in conformity with the pious or decent custom of the family’. In the family’s pew he kept an edition of the Septuagint Bible and the Greek testament. During the morning and evening services, he would consult the verse on which the sermon was based in the original text. Should he come across ‘doubt, alas or objections that invincibly rushed into my head’, he would later consult ‘the learned expositors’ at home.¹¹⁴

Gibbon’s insistence that reverence for the Reformed religion was the only means by which patriotic citizenship could truly be expressed is also clear in his youthful conversion back to Protestantism. After Oxford, Gibbon passed some years at Lausanne under the tutelage of Daniel Pavillard, a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church and honorary professor of civil history as well as librarian at the academy of Lausanne. Gibbon took seventeen months to join the Reformed fold. On Christmas Day 1754, he took the sacrament at the church of Lausanne and there resolved to suspend his ‘religious enquiries, acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants’.¹¹⁵ He wrote to his aunt Catherine Porten in February 1755, reporting that he had become ‘a good Protestant’. Having been brought up ‘with all the ideas of the Church of England’, at first he could ‘scarce resolve to communion with Presbyterians’ in Switzerland. He eventually decided that he could partake in Swiss Reformed services because ‘whatever difference there may be between their churches & ours, in the government & discipline they still regard us as brethren and profess the same faith as us’.¹¹⁶

In later life, Gibbon believed it was crucial for elite sceptics to revere the established faith because its popular devotion was still insecure. Although the Reformation had resulted in a simpler worship, it remained ‘to observe, whether such sublime simplicity be consistent

¹¹² B. W. Young, “‘Scepticism in excess’: Gibbon and eighteenth-century Christianity”, *Historical journal*, 41:1 (1998), 179-99.

¹¹³ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 140.

¹¹⁴ Edward Gibbon, *The autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Murray (London, 1897), pp. 248-9.

¹¹⁵ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 98.

¹¹⁶ Gibbon to Catherine Porten, February 1755, in *Letters*, I, p. 3.

with popular devotion'. Gibbon was unsure 'whether the vulgar, in the absence of all visible objects, will not be inflamed by enthusiasm, or insensibly subside in languor and indifference'. Sacerdotal priests had at least restrained 'the bigot from thinking as he pleases, and the slave from speaking as he thinks'.¹¹⁷ It was dangerous for enthusiastic philosophers to take the licence to attack the public faith. Conversely, the threat of superstitious priestcraft remained strong. Although lay Christians were taught to acknowledge no law but scripture alone and no interpreter but their consciences, this 'freedom was the consequence, rather than the design, of the reformation'. The 'patriot reformers were ambitious of succeeding the tyrants whom they had dethroned'.¹¹⁸ Citing Burnet's three-volume *The history of the Reformation of the Church of England* (1679-1753), Gibbon condemned 'the flames of Smithfield' and 'the zeal of Cranmer' in persecuting Anabaptism. Unfortunately, the 'sense and humanity' of the young Edward VI 'were oppressed by the authority of the primate'.¹¹⁹

It is instructive, again, to compare Gibbon's Ciceronian caution in requiring the sceptical philosopher to respect the public worship with the heterodox Cambridge clergyman Middleton. In his three-volume *Life of Cicero* (1741), Middleton argued that the eponymous pagan had been an exemplar of 'natural' religion in contradistinction to the corrupted superstitions of Roman paganism. Cicero's religion was 'undoubtedly of *heavenly extraction*'.¹²⁰ Cicero believed in God, general providence, and the doctrine of posthumous punishments and rewards.¹²¹ Further, '*Cicero's porticos*' represented 'the seat of the most refined reason, wit, and learning'. Although the site of Cicero's living place had been replaced by the '*Monkish cloisters*' of a Dominican monastery, 'a nursery of superstition, bigotry, and enthusiasm', its ruins recalled a man whose writings, 'by spreading the light of reason and liberty thro' the world, have been one great instrument of obstructing their unwearied pains to enslave it'.¹²²

In his *Letter to Dr Waterland* (1730), referring to Daniel Waterland, orthodox Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Middleton argued that his aim to reconcile Christian faith with the precepts of natural religion did not stand in tension with his support of the established church. Invoking Socrates, Seneca, and Cicero, Middleton claimed that heathen moralists 'though they clearly saw the cheat and forgery of the *established Religion*, yet

¹¹⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 437.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 438.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., n. 37.

¹²⁰ Conyers Middleton, *The history of the life of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, 3 vols. (London, 1741), III, p. 349.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 340-4.

¹²² Ibid., I, pp. xxi-xxxii.

always persuade and recommend a submission to it'. They knew 'what mischief must needs befall the State by the subversion of constitutions so greatly revered by the people'.¹²³ Middleton recalled that during his exile Cicero decided to visit sacred sites in order to give himself 'an opportunity of shewing himself every where in a light, which naturally attracts the attention of the multitude, by testing a pious regard to the favourite superstitions and local religions of the Country'.¹²⁴ Roman pagan observance served as a reminder that religion should usefully reinforce the moral and social virtues. In one section of the *Letter from Rome*, Middleton argued that ancient heroes 'were raised up into Gods, and received *Divine Honours* in Acknowledgement for some *signal Benefits* they had been the *Authors* of to Mankind'. By contrast, Roman Catholic saints were often 'never heard of, but in their own *Legends or Fabulous Histories*' and many owed 'all the Honours now paid them, to their *Vices* or their *Errors*'. The false heroes of Roman Catholicism simply raised 'Rebellion in Defence of *their Idol*' and threw 'whole Kingdoms into Convulsions for the Sake of some *gainful Imposture*'.¹²⁵

There is, perhaps, an incongruity between Gibbon's Ciceronian commitment to revering even imperfect established articles of faith and the nature of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of *Decline and fall*. Gibbon's reputation as an atheist or deist owes a great deal to the immediate reception of those two chapters in which he offered secular reasons for the spread of primitive Christianity as opposed to a providential justification.¹²⁶ The secular causes were fivefold. First, the 'inflexible and... the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses'. Second, the 'doctrine of a future life'. Third, 'the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church'. Fourth, the 'pure and austere morals of the Christians'. Fifth, the 'union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire'.¹²⁷

¹²³ Conyers Middleton, *A letter to Dr. Waterland* (London, 1731), p. 52.

¹²⁴ Middleton, *Life of Cicero*, II, p. 22.

¹²⁵ Middleton, *Letter from Rome*, p. 33.

¹²⁶ See Myron C. Noonkester, 'Gibbon and the clergy: private virtues, public vices', *Harvard theological quarterly*, 83:4 (1990), 399-414; David Womersley (ed.), *Religious scepticism: contemporary responses to Gibbon* (Bristol, 1997); *Gibbon and the 'watchmen of the holy city': the historian and his reputation, 1776-1815* (Oxford, 2002).

¹²⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, I, p. 447.

Pocock has persuasively argued that the chapters were preliminary to Gibbon's main historical argument that properly began with the history of the council of Nicaea.¹²⁸ David Womersley has suggested that Gibbon's key motivation in writing the chapters, which Gibbon himself judged to be expendable from his history, was a desire for fame.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, there remains a tension between Gibbon's immediate reception and his own intentions. At the opening of chapter fifteen, Gibbon argued that the 'great law of impartiality' required the historian 'to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the gospel' even though, 'to a careless observer, *their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed'.¹³⁰ It is likely that Gibbon did not believe his account of the secular reasons for the rise of Christianity should undermine any of the essentials of the faith. In his guise as an elite of Hanoverian England, he felt safe to publish the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters without threatening the integrity of the public faith.

Smile, sigh, and subscribe

Each volume of *Decline and fall* was published as the Church of England underwent the subscription controversy. Clergymen who doubted the veracity of the thirty-nine articles, especially those relating to the trinity, argued that they should not be required to subscribe to them to hold office within the Church of England. The 'volumes of controversy are overspread with cobwebs', Gibbon quipped in *Decline and fall*, while the 'doctrine of a Protestant church is far removed from the knowledge or belief of its private members'. Meanwhile, 'the forms of orthodoxy, the articles of faith, are subscribed with a sigh or smile by the modern clergy'.¹³¹ Gibbon was referring to those who subscribed despite their doubts about the trinity, intimating that doubts about the veracity of its articles was no reason to seek to undermine the established faith. The articles were imperfect human formularies and, where reason failed to instruct, custom was a legitimate guide. Opponents of subscription might have consulted the second chapter of *Decline and fall* in which Gibbon described the Antonine religious order. Although the patricians viewed 'with a smile of pity and indulgence the various errors of the vulgar', they 'diligently practised the ceremonies of their fathers

¹²⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Edward Gibbon in history: aspects of the text in *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire*', in *The Tanner lectures on human values*, XI, ed. Grethe B. Petersen (Salt Lake City, 1988), p. 339. See also Pocock, 'Gibbon and the primitive church', p. 48.

¹²⁹ See David Womersley, 'Gibbon and the "watchmen of the holy city": revision and religion in the *Decline and fall*', in *Edward Gibbon and empire*, eds. Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 213-5.

¹³⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, I, p. 447.

¹³¹ Ibid., III, p. 439.

[and] devoutly frequented the temples of the gods'. Sometimes they condescended 'to act a part in the theatre of superstition' and 'concealed the sentiments of an Atheist under the sacerdotal robes'. Rational men of such a temper 'were scarcely inclined to wrangle about their respective modes of faith and worship'.¹³²

Since opponents of subscription were considering leaving the Church of England, Gibbon was charting a middle way between orthodoxy and Dissent. Opponents of subscription might learn from the Antonines that a universal spirit of toleration, including of the vulgar, needed to accompany the contemplation of the universal cause. The ecclesiastical policy of those emperors 'was happily seconded by the reflections of the enlightened, and by the habits of the superstitious, part of their subjects'. The various modes of worship were 'all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful'. Toleration resulted in 'not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord'. Opponents of subscription needed to recall the limits of the human mind in deciphering mysteries of faith. Orthodox clergymen needed to remember that it was not their sacerdotal role to fabricate superstitions or engage in pointless metaphysical squabbles. Under the Antonines, the 'superstition of the people was not embittered by any mixture of theological rancour; nor was it confined by the chains of any speculative system'.¹³³

Following the parliamentary defeat of a petition to relieve clergymen, lawyers, and physicians from the requirement to subscribe in 1762, Gibbon wrote to John Holroyd Baker, earl of Sheffield, celebrating 'the late Victory of our Dear Mamma the Church of England'. Her '71 rebellious sons' in the Commons who supported abolition had 'pretended to set aside her will on account of insanity'. Fortunately, she was saved by '217 worthy champions' led by Lord North, Edmund Burke, Hans Stanley, Charles Fox, Godfrey Clarke, and others. Even though the Church's saviours 'allowed the 39 Clauses of her Testament were absurd and unreasonable', they 'suffered the validity of it with infinite humour'.¹³⁴ Gibbon's commentary seems remarkably close to that of the passage in *Decline and fall*, in which he argued that the devotion of the poet or philosopher 'may be secretly nourished by prayer, meditation, and study', but the exercise of 'public worship appears to be the only solid foundation of the religious sentiments of the people, which derive their force from imitation and habit'. Should that worship be interrupted, it 'may consummate, in the period of a few

¹³² Ibid., I, p. 59.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 56.

¹³⁴ Gibbon to Sheffield, 8 February 1762, in *Letters*, I, p. 305.

years, the important work of a national revolution'. The 'memory of theological opinions cannot long be preserved, without the artificial helps of priests, of temples, and of books'.¹³⁵

Dissenters seized upon the failure of the anti-subscription campaign as confirmation of their case against the popish nature of the Church of England. One such figure was Priestley. While discussing the campaign in *Decline and fall*, Gibbon recommended 'to public animadversion' two passages in Priestley's *History of the corruptions of Christianity* (1782), at the first of which, 'the priest', and, at the second, 'the magistrate, may tremble!'¹³⁶ The first passage discussed Priestley's providential Unitarianism. Following the Reformation, Priestley explained, divine providence had opened 'the minds of men by easy degrees'. The 'detection of one falsehood, prepares us for the detection of another, till before we are aware of it, we can find no trace the immense, and seemingly well compacted system'.¹³⁷ The second passage attacked on explicitly millenarian grounds the idea of an alliance between church and state as an impious proposition. But the relationship was so strong, intimated Priestley, that its destruction might only be precluded by the collapse of the civil power. Such a situation may be a calamity but, he asked, 'what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation, if it be attended with so desirable an event' as the second coming of Christ?¹³⁸

In Priestley's argument, Gibbon feared that puritan enthusiasm was donning a more respectable cloak. Gibbon reported, with some tint of irony, that 'the friends of Christianity are alarmed at the boundless impulse of enquiry and scepticism'. They were right to be so, since the secular order relied on an established faith. The 'pillars of revelation are shaken by those men who preserve the name without the substance of religion' and 'who indulge the licence without the temper of philosophy'.¹³⁹ Priestley was guilty of enthusiasm in both religion and philosophy. His dangerous arguments risked not simply undermining the public faith but the civil order upon which it depended.

Gibbon had had form with Priestley. In December 1782, Priestley sent Gibbon his first volume of the *History of the corruptions of Christianity*. In it, Priestley supposed that Gibbon had accurately identified the main reason for the corruption of primitive Christianity as the church fathers' adoption of the Platonic distinction between matter and spirit. This had led to the mistaken conceptions of the soul as immaterial and eternal as well as of Christ

¹³⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, II, p. 89.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, III, p. 439, n. 42.

¹³⁷ Joseph Priestley, *An history of the corruptions of Christianity*, 2 vols. (Birmingham, 1782), I, pp. 275-6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 484.

¹³⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 439.

being raised to equal status with God. Gibbon replied on 28 January 1783 that, unlike Priestley, Gibbon respected Christianity as the lawfully established faith. Priestley had mistakenly supposed that Gibbon wished to undo the very basis of the Christian commonwealth of whig England. Gibbon warned Priestley that ‘as long as you attach opinions which I have never maintained, or maintained principles which I have never denied you may safely exult in my silence’. Gibbon felt assured that the public would decide ‘to whom the invidious name of *unbeliever* belongs’: between ‘the historian, who without interposing his own sentiments, has delivered a simple narrative of authentic facts’ or the disputant who ‘proudly rejects all natural proof of the immortality of the soul, overthrows (by circumscribing) the inspiration of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and condemns the religion of every Christian Nation as a fable less innocent, but not less absurd, than Mahomet’s journey to the third heaven’.¹⁴⁰

If the subscription controversy had been grist to the mill of Dissent, the arrival of the French Revolution stoked Gibbon’s fears of enthusiasm yet further. In his memoirs, Gibbon commented on the panic spreading across France. The ‘fanatic missionaries of sedition have scattered seeds of discontent in our cities and villages’. This compared favourably with Gibbon’s England. He was fortunate to have been born ‘in a free and enlightened country, in an honourable and wealthy family’.¹⁴¹ In a letter to Sheffield in 1789, Gibbon bemoaned how revolutionary fervour meant the French priesthood was ‘plundered in a Way which strikes at the root of all property’. Meanwhile, across the Channel, a group of Dissenters were still celebrating the Revolution as symbolic of human progress. In England, ‘a set of wild Visionaries (like our Dr Price)... gravely debate and dream about the establishment of a pure and perfect democracy’.¹⁴²

Gibbon wrote with ironic approbation for Burke’s *Reflections on the revolution in France* (1791) in private correspondence: ‘I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry, and I can even forgive his superstition.’ The ‘primitive Church, which I have treated with some freedom, was itself, at that time, an innovation, and *I* was attached to the old Pagan establishment’.¹⁴³ Gibbon’s sentiments are similar to a passage in his *Vindication*, in which he explained to his clerical opponents that ‘the Pagan worship was a matter, not of *opinion*, but of *custom*’.¹⁴⁴ It mattered that custom had filled the territory left

¹⁴⁰ Gibbon to Joseph Priestley, 28 January 1783, in *Letters*, II, pp. 320-1.

¹⁴¹ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, pp. 179-80.

¹⁴² Gibbon to John Baker Holroyd, earl of Sheffield, 15 December 1789, in *Letters*, III, p. 184.

¹⁴³ Gibbon to Sheffield, 5 February 1791, in *ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁴⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, pp. 1158.

vacant by reason. However dissatisfied religious believers or philosophic sceptics in England might have been with their national worship, their gravest error was to neglect its importance in expressing citizenship. Gibbon instructively commented on Burke in his memoirs to great ironic effect. Gibbon could ‘almost excuse his [Burke’s] reverence for Church establishments’. He had sometimes ‘thought of writing a dialogue of the dead, in which Lucian, Erasmus, and Voltaire should mutually acknowledge the danger of exposing an *old* superstition to the contempt of the blind and fanatic multitude’.¹⁴⁵

Gibbon believed a Christian civil religion was intrinsic to building civilised and enlightened society. He argued that the Erasmian strands of the Reformation had begun to return Christians to pious contemplation of the universal cause without persecuting others over unverifiable mysteries of faith. Through the legacy of Erasmus and the latitudinarians, inward freedom of conscience had become balanced with an appreciation of the limits of the human intellect. The established faith restrained superstitious priestcraft and brought popular beliefs within the sphere of civil safety. A pastoral, pedagogical, and tolerant establishment prevented backsliding into enthusiasm. The Church of England was to revive the ancient achievement of serving worldly civic life and patriotic citizenship. It would reinforce public peace and well-being in this world in preparation for the prospect of punishments and rewards in the next world. Respect for the public religion was not simply advisable for the prudent statesman. It was a crucial expression of citizenship within the Reformed Christian commonwealth of Hanoverian Britain. It behoved the sceptical patrician, Protestant Dissenter, and heterodox Anglican to smile and condescend to the national faith. Priestley and his friends had failed to understand that civilisation, governed by the limits of human understanding, could hope for little more.

¹⁴⁵ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 194.

Chapter 7

Subscription, reform, and Enlightened Dissent

Sincerity and the unreformed Church of England

During the late eighteenth century, two new concepts of civil religion came to challenge hitherto dominant Anglican versions. The first new concept remained Anglican but its supporters were committed to a more comprehensive vision of an established church. Proponents of the second new concept rejected Anglicanism for a Dissenting vision of civil religion that, upon the arrival of the millennium, would not require an established church. Both had much in common with earlier strands of civil religion. They celebrated the civil magistrate as the guarantor of Protestant spiritual liberty. Until the point of millennial perfection, proponents of both new concepts of civil religion remained committed to a church establishment in the Protestant nation against the dark forces of Roman Catholicism at home and abroad. The church establishment also upheld Christian morality in support of social order. Superstition and sacerdotal priests were to be prevented by the secular protections of the state in the Christian commonwealth. Committed to a *sola scriptura* approach, they aimed to construct anew the precepts of primitive Christianity. Learned ministers of the gospel would guide the laity in accessing the scriptures to maintain the relationship between the believer and God without sacerdotal mediation. Ministers were also pastoral and pedagogical to prevent backsliding into enthusiasm. Reason, science, and polite letters remained key signifiers of enlightened religion.

Such features remained constant. But those that changed were the targets of the language of Protestant Reformation and spiritual enlightenment. A language once used to justify the Christian commonwealth of whig England founded on the Revolution settlement of 1688-9 was now being redeployed, to varying extents, against that very order. Proponents of both new concepts of civil religion sought a comprehensive vision of the church establishment. If the church was the whole nation at prayer, it should include the whole nation without doctrinal speculation in matters of faith. The church establishment must share a common worship as the expression of a commonwealth founded upon gospel Christianity. The first new concept of civil religion emerged in the subscription controversy between the 1760s and 1780s. Its exponents claimed to follow the principles of Anglican latitudinarianism to their fullest conclusions. Hanoverian latitudinarians had insisted that the established church should tolerate theological breadth among its followers. In the absence of enforceable conformity, clergymen would have to dwell on the essential doctrines uniting all Protestants

in external worship and accept that the rest were merely *adiaphora*. The essentials had been laid out by Christ in the gospel. The scientific study of nature on Newtonian principles was taken to confirm the creative ordering of God.¹ Latitudinarianism was a deliberate compromise. It sought to hold together Protestants whose doctrines and theologies were often in conflict. It distinguished between inward faith and outward loyalty. It required that disagreement with the articles and creeds of the established church be put aside in the interest of Protestant unity and civil order.

But the central problem confronting those seeking to reconcile heterodox beliefs with the Anglican establishment was the Protestant preoccupation with sincerity. By the 1760s, the development of rational Christianity brought increasing pressure to bear on proponents of Anglican civil religion who had overwhelmingly emphasised latitude. Church reform came initially from within latitudinarian circles and its supporters sought to generate a comprehensive Protestant establishment with minimal doctrinal requirements. Attention fixed upon the practice at the universities of imposing subscription to the thirty-nine articles on students. The articles relating to the doctrine of the trinity proved most burdensome. Among Anglican latitudinarians who opposed the principle of subscription, the dominant conception of Hanoverian civil religion began to collapse under the pressure of sincerity. The doctrines of some clergymen had slid so far into Socinianism or Unitarianism that, in opposition to Gibbon, they believed it would no longer suffice to sigh and smile to receive their livings.

There have been several intellectual histories of the subscription controversy in the context of eighteenth-century English debates about church reform. These have highlighted how the arguments in favour of abolition were couched in the language of ongoing Protestant Reformation as learned clergymen claimed to purge Christianity of its corruptions to return by means of *sola scriptura* principles back to the true religion of the gospels.² The object of the present chapter is to supplement these accounts by demonstrating how ideas of civil religion lay at the heart of the debate. Anglican opponents of subscription were defending an establishment with the classic hallmarks of eighteenth-century English civil religion but which asserted the principle of comprehension. They believed the Church of England had to make good its Reformed commitment to sincerity and unite all English Protestants against the

¹ See Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*.

² See Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Rational Dissent in the late eighteenth century with particular reference to the growth of toleration', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Wales, 1982); 'Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways'; Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*, pp. 130-8; A. M. C. Waterman, 'A Cambridge "via media" in late Georgian Anglicanism', *Journal of ecclesiastical history*, 42:3 (1991), 419-36; Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 45-80; Bradley, 'Changing shape of religious ideas in Enlightened England'.

dark forces of popery. Although latitudinarians accepted that churches were human and imperfect institutions, they were mistaken to deny access to the establishment to Protestants who were loyal to the Christian commonwealth but whose tender consciences led them to doubt sincerely its articles and creeds.

The campaign was led by a group of clergymen associated with the University of Cambridge. Edmund Law (1703-87) was master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, from 1754 and became bishop of Carlisle in 1768. His long-time friend, Francis Blackburne (1705-87), produced the central publication for reform entitled *The confessional, or a full and free enquiry into the right, utility, and success of establishing confessions of faith and doctrine in Protestant churches*. First published in 1767, it was expanded in 1770. Blackburne's work provided the occasion for a meeting at the Feathers Tavern in London in 1770 at which he drew up a petition calling for abolition of subscription. The petition was presented to the House of Commons in February 1772, but it enjoyed the support of only 71 MPs. In 1774, when another attempt was made, the petition was not even put to the vote.³ Following the failure of the petition, Blackburne refused any preferment that might require a fresh subscription but both he and Law resolved to remain within the fold of the establishment.

They remained with a rump of latitudinarian clergymen who continued to defend from within the establishment both standard and comprehensive Anglican conceptions of civil religion. Later Cambridge clergymen who would come to represent the survival of the latitudinarian tradition in its competing forms included Richard Watson, bishop of Llandaff (1737-1816), William Paley (1743-1805), Christopher Wyvill (1740-1822), and John Horne Tooke (1736-1812). But a group of reformers opted to secede from the Church of England altogether. About ten Anglican ministers left the Church; four for Unitarianism.⁴ John Jebb (1736-1786), a Peterhouse associate of Bishop Law, resigned his fellowship for Unitarianism in 1775, having failed to reform the university's curriculum and examination system.⁵ Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), Blackburne's son-in-law, found new livings at the first Unitarian chapel set up in London's Essex Street. It would be attended by Augustus Fitzroy, duke of Grafton, prime minister and chancellor of the University of Cambridge, whose own

³ See G. M. Ditchfield, 'The subscription issue in British parliamentary politics, 1772-1791', *Parliamentary history*, 7:1 (1988), 45-80.

⁴ E. M. Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, MA, 1952), p. 290. See John Jebb, *A short state of the reasons for a late resignation* (Cambridge, 1773); Theophilus Lindsey, *A farewell address to the parishioners of Catterick* (London, 1774); *A sermon preached at the opening of the chapel in Essex-House, Essex-Street* (London, 1774); John Disney, *Reasons for resigning the rectory of Panton and vicarage of Swinderby in Lincolnshire* 2nd edn (London, 1783).

⁵ John Jebb, *The works theological, medical, political and miscellaneous of John Jebb*, 3 vols. (London, 1787), I, pp. 10, 20.

secession from the established church followed years spent trying to reform it.⁶ The Essex Street congregation would also count John Disney (1746-1816), another Peterhusian and son-in-law of Blackburne whom Bishop Law had chosen for a chaplain.

For those seceding from the establishment, a third variety of civil religion was available. Dissatisfaction with the apparent conservatism of the Church in maintaining articles and creeds composed during the sixteenth century prompted reformers to take civil religion in Unitarian and congregational directions. This variety of civil religion was a product of old Protestant Dissent. Its proponents criticised the Church of England for being unreformed and provided a vision of a civilised and polite Christian commonwealth which, upon the arrival of the millennium, would jettison an established church. Its vision of civil religion was not to be realised immediately; it was to be the product of continual enlightenment and spiritual improvement. Its millennial vision was one of gradual and progressive reform in which the second coming would result from human perfectibility. Until that point, Dissenting theorists of civil religion accepted the need for a tolerant church establishment to defend social order, embody the whole Protestant nation at prayer, and foster spiritual improvement by its learned and pastoral clergy.

The likes of Disney, Jebb, and Lindsey were aligning themselves with such figures as Priestley and Price. Priestley was a Unitarian theologian and clergyman whose polymath career produced works on natural philosophy, chemistry, education, and political theory. The reaction to the French Revolution during the 1790s brought great dangers to Priestley and forced him to flee to the United States of America where he became an associate of Benjamin Franklin. The interests of Price were equally as wide-ranging. A Welsh Nonconformist of a liberal Calvinist hue, his works covered moral philosophy, politics, finance, and mathematics. His ardent support for the cause of the American colonists during the 1770s gave him a reputation as a political as well as a religious reformer. His sermon to the Revolution Society on 5 November 1789 in support of the early stages of the French Revolution provided the occasion for the fulminations of Burke's *Reflections*.

In the hands of Enlightened Dissent, concepts of civil religion that had been characterised by latitudinarian moderation within the church establishment throughout the eighteenth century were now to be re-fashioned along congregational and Unitarian lines.⁷ By

⁶ See, for example, Augustus FitzRoy, duke of Grafton, *Hints submitted to the serious attention of the clergy, nobility and gentry* (London, 1789), pp. 30-1, 41.

⁷ As Knud Haakonssen has explained, care must be taken in defining this group of Dissenters. While the terms 'rational' and 'Enlightened Dissent' tend to be used interchangeably, they denote slightly different meanings. The term 'rational' tends to categorise Dissenters who rejected Calvinism and the necessity of spiritual

emphasising the centrality of gospel simplicity, Protestant sincerity, and moral egalitarianism, Enlightened Dissenters developed a new vision. Once again, the secular state would prevent the accumulation of priestly power but it would eventually do so by renouncing all responsibility whatsoever over matters spiritual. The civility of Dissenting religion would depend less on priests appointed by the state than on a multitude of rational congregations engaging in polite and candid debate as well as electing their own ministers. The religion of Enlightened Dissent would emphatically not be the enthusiasm, as rational Dissenters themselves perceived it, of Methodists and the like. A learned clergy was still vital. But it would not need to be trained by the antiquated methods of the universities; the new science and free enquiry of the Dissenting academies would provide a far superior clerical education.

Casting their programme as a staging post in an ongoing Reformation that had ultimately millennial ends, Enlightened Dissenters pushed the concept of the priesthood of all believers to fuller conclusions. While some, on the radical fringes, rejected religious establishments altogether in favour of a completely free intercourse of Protestant opinion, others were content to worship alongside the Church of England. Their commitment to the congregational election of ministers among myriad small societies of sincere, egalitarian, and perpetually enlightening Protestants rejected the Erastianism of the magisterial Reformation even though they willingly cohabited with it. Superstition was doomed in the face of Dissenting moral optimism and the expectation that free enquiry would purify religion back to its primitive ideal. Gone was reliance on the legal and ecclesiological frameworks of the magisterial Reformation, which was now reduced to a mere milestone in the ongoing process of spiritual flourishing. Gone was the language of the godly prince: the majesty of the Protestant king was eventually to be superseded by the primacy of popular sovereignty. The church establishment was necessary to protect the Protestant nation, in its condition of spiritual imperfection, from over-mighty priests. But with the rise of spiritual enlightenment would come the realisation that all establishments were equivalents of imposture. The civil magistrate might only legitimately intervene in matters spiritual in the instances that belief threatened life, liberty, and estate. Anything else was tyranny.

regeneration and it is, therefore, usually associated with Unitarianism. But the term ‘Enlightened’ Dissent more broadly encapsulates those whose outlook was shared by Anglican Enlightenment in seeking to reconcile reason and a spirit of toleration with Christian belief. Since a Dissenting vision of civil religion was advanced by more figures than Unitarians, ‘Enlightened Dissent’ is a more convenient term here. See ‘Enlightened Dissent: an introduction’, in *Enlightenment and religion*, ed. Haakonssen, pp. 4-5.

Anglican comprehension and the subscription controversy

Doubts about the legitimacy of clerical subscription to the thirty-nine articles were not new.⁸ Supporters of the Revolution settlement had sought to calm heterodox doubters throughout the century. Bishop Burnet argued in 1699 that the Articles had been calibrated in such a manner so that Protestants might subscribe to them despite their contradictions.⁹ Samuel Clarke presented a fresh justification in his *The scripture doctrine of the trinity* (1712). He explained that Protestants, unlike Roman Catholics, understood all doctrines and institutions were imperfect and fallible because they were of human design. The Anglican clergyman might subscribe to the articles 'whenever he can in any sense at all reconcile them with scripture'.¹⁰ Often the problem was not as radical as anti-trinitarianism but lay in the Arminian rejection of Calvinism. Doubters might also have considered the question from the point of view of high-churchmen. Daniel Waterland, no Arian he, bridled at what he perceived as the Calvinistic notes struck by the thirty-nine articles such as the seventeenth article on the doctrine of predestination.¹¹

But opponents of subscription extended the Chillingworthian claim that the Bible was the religion of all Protestants to more radical conclusions. Anglican clergymen, they believed, need only profess their faith in the scriptures as the word of God. Anything else was human imposition. Doctrines like the trinity were not rooted in scripture but were the product of patristic pettifogging and illegitimate church councils. During the heat of the Bangorian controversy, Thomas Herne had argued that the ordinances issued by the established church carried no legitimacy because all civil and ecclesiastical government relied on consent.¹² John Jackson, who had been a student of Clarke's, claimed that doctrines could only be imposed once they have been shown to have been clearly expressed in the gospel.¹³

The argument for a comprehensive Anglican civil religion was adumbrated as the subscription controversy erupted. It extended the language of Protestant Reformation and the battle against priestcraft and imposture to include aspects of the Hanoverian Church of England. Blackburne argued that the expectation that clergymen would subscribe to imperfect human creeds represented the failure of the Protestant commitment to defend the sincerity of

⁸ For an account emphasising the Hoadlyite origins of the subscription controversy, see John Gascoigne, 'Anglican latitudinarianism and political radicalism in the late eighteenth century', *History*, 71:231 (1986), pp. 22-5.

⁹ Gilbert Burnet, *An exposition of the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England* (London, 1699), p. 8.

¹⁰ Samuel Clarke, *The scripture doctrine of the trinity* (London, 1712), pp. ii, ix-xii. See also J. P. Ferguson, *Dr Samuel Clarke* (Kington, 1976), p. 179.

¹¹ Daniel Waterland, *The case of Arian subscription considered* (Cambridge, 1721), pp. 39-42.

¹² Thomas Herne, *An essay on imposing and subscribing articles of religion* (London, 1718), p. 8.

¹³ John Jackson, *The ground of civil and ecclesiastical government* (London, 1718).

lay consciences against popish creed-making.¹⁴ If ‘the rule of a pure religion be taken from the christian scriptures, the temporal peace and safety of any Christian in civil society is but a secondary consideration to the obligation he is under to hold fast his integrity, in *truth* and *sincerity*’.¹⁵ The Feathers Tavern petitioners claimed that the Church held as little legitimate right to prescribe doctrines as to enforce them because they stood among the ‘rights and privileges which they [Christians] hold of God only’.¹⁶ It was especially inappropriate for undergraduates ‘at an age so immature for their disquisitions and decisions of such moment’. They should be focused on their study rather than ‘subscribe their unfeigned assent to a variety of theological propositions’.¹⁷

To remove the requirement to subscribe would be to enable the church to comprehend all Protestants. Thus, argued Blackburne, the benefits of a church establishment in providing ‘methods of public worship, and public edification’ would be improved. It would better serve ‘weekly exhortations to christian piety and virtue’, and the zeal ‘for the protestant religion and government’.¹⁸ If defenders of church establishments believed in ‘their professions of asserting christian liberty’, they must not mandate acceptance of ‘certain doctrines and modes of worship, for which they have no other than human authority’.¹⁹ It was a ‘vain conceit’ that ‘we can speak of the things of God better than in the words of God’. It was little short of popish idolatry, this ‘deifying our own interpretations’ and ‘tyrannous enforcing them upon others’. Moreover, it was ‘restraining the word of God from that latitude and generality, and the understandings of men from that liberty, wherein Christ and the Apostles left them’. These errors were the only ‘fountain of the schisms of the church’.²⁰ If the established church was to use creeds, they must be the simplest possible forms. They must represent the creed of Christ and the apostles.

The petitioners put the argument similarly. Loyalty to the established church expressed belonging within a Christian commonwealth which was committed to Protestant individualism. It was desirable that Protestants of all hues might sincerely support the establishment. Why should men subscribe to articles about which ‘their private opinions can be of no consequence to the public’? The petition was expressly cast as a defence of ‘the right

¹⁴ Francis Blackburne, *The confessional*, 3rd edn (London, 1770), pp. 32-47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

¹⁶ Cobbett (ed.), *Parliamentary history*, XVII, p. 251.

¹⁷ ‘Copy of a the petition of the clergy, &c. relative to subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles offered on Thursday 6th of February, 1772’, in Francis Blackburne, *The works, theological and miscellaneous of Francis Blackburne*, 7 vols. (London, 1804), VII, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸ Blackburne, *Confessional*, pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52n. The relevant passage is from Chillingworth, ‘Religion of the Protestants’ in *Works*, p. 203.

of private judgement' and 'true religion'. Those 'many pious and conscientious men' who agonised over their possible hypocrisy in subscribing were also 'useful subjects of the state' by buttressing social order through Christian teaching.²¹ Bishop Law cast the abolition of subscription as the continuation of the Reformation in which lay believers would rationally access the scriptures without the intervention of self-interested priests whose clerical careers depended on the hypocrisy of subscribing to articles with which they did not agree.²² Opposing subscription meant fighting priestly imposture, purging the church of popish superstition, and securing the Christian's relationship with God.

Support for the Feathers Tavern petition was, by extension, justified on the grounds of gospel simplicity. The object of the Reformation was to purge corrupt religion and restore the pure religion espoused by Christ in the gospels. Blackburne insisted that defenders of subscription were 'endeavouring the repair, and *daub with untempered mortar*, certain *strong-holds* and *partition-walls*, which it was the design of the Gospel to throw down and to level'.²³ The object of further Reformation was to restore Christ's promise which 'called all men unto liberty, the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and restored them to the privilege of working out their own salvation by their own understandings and endeavours'. For man's salvation, 'sufficient means are afforded in the holy scriptures, without having sufficient recourse to the doctrines and commandments of men'.²⁴ For Bishop Law, the 'Christian religion as originally constituted' was 'very plain and practical; level to all capacities, and calculated for the common good of mankind, in every station and condition, both here and hereafter'.²⁵ Law believed creeds designed by men corrupted the primitive purity of Christianity. He proposed a revised liturgy to produce a more comprehensive version of the Church of England.²⁶

Care must be taken over the relationship between gospel simplicity, revelation, and natural religion. It was common for theorists of civil religion, particularly when deism had been more fashionable during the 1720s and 1730s, to insist that all three were coterminous. But it was not automatic. Often, in seeking to increase toleration within the established church, Anglican reformers were seeking to encompass other forms of religion than natural Christianity. As Young has shown, Blackburne considered himself a Calvinist of the most

²¹ 'Copy of the petition of the clergy', in Blackburne, *Works*, VII, pp. 18-19.

²² Edmund Law, *Considerations on the propriety of requiring a subscription to articles of faith*, 2nd edn (London, 1774), pp. 7, 48-9, 59, 62.

²³ Blackburne, *Confessional*, p. 215.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Law, *Considerations on the propriety*, p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

liberal kind, who opposed natural religion as the infidel faith of polite *litterati*. Doubtful of the Arianism of Clarke as well as Socinianism, Blackburne insisted on the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus Christ based on a Chillingworthian *sola scriptura* approach.²⁷ His opposition to subscription was based on a distaste of the Athanasian notes struck by the thirty-nine articles. For him, they lacked scriptural justification.

Church reform was therefore cast as the fulfilment of the Protestant nation of whig England. It was the historic mission of Revolution principles to unite all sincere Protestants against the forces of popish Rome. Blackburne was an associate of Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn, whose strident anti-Catholicism has been well documented.²⁸ Both believed that Roman Catholicism was on the rise in England, and a comprehensive church would allow Protestants to unite against the real enemy.²⁹ Blackburne remembered that his years as an undergraduate at Cambridge were spent acquiring 'a strong attachment to the principles of ecclesiastical and civil liberty' primarily through the works of Locke and Hoadly.³⁰ He insisted that true Protestants should tolerate the multiplicity of interpretations that might emerge from a conscientious reading of scripture.³¹ The established Church of England should comprehend the entirety of these interpretations.³² No human church could justifiably 'require assent to a certain sense of scripture, exclusive of other sense, without an unwarrantable interference'.³³ They were all disagreeable 'to the word of God'.³⁴

Reformers sought recourse to the godly prince-in-parliament at the head of the magisterial Reformation. The petitioners appealed to 'this honourable house [of Commons]' and looked 'under God, to the wisdom and justice of a Protestant king'.³⁵ Revolution principles had subjected ministers of the Church of England to civil control. They must now include a purge of unnecessary creeds that coerced sincere Protestants into conformity. Reformers were rehearsing the common claim that the transcendental mission of a godly Protestant king was to defend true religion and the spirituality of the lay believer from popery. Opposition to subscription also set a yardstick against which to measure the godliness

²⁷ Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, p. 52.

²⁸ Caroline Robbins, 'The strenuous whig, Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn', *William and Mary quarterly*, 7:3 (1950), 406-53; P. D. Marshall, 'Thomas Hollis (1720-74): the bibliophile as libertarian', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 66:2 (1984), 246-63; W. H. Bond, *Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn: a whig and his books* (Cambridge, 1990); Fitzpatrick, 'Latitudinarianism at the parting of the ways', pp. 218-19.

²⁹ Francis Blackburne (ed.), *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, 2 vols. (London, 1780), I, p. 302.

³⁰ Blackburne, *Works*, I, p. iv.

³¹ Blackburne, *Confessional*, pp. 4-5.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 419-20.

³⁵ 'Copy of the petition of the clergy', in Blackburne, *Works*, VII, pp. 18-19.

of England's monarchs. In the preface to the *Confessional*, Blackburne surveyed the history of seventeenth-century Anglicanism and criticised the extent to which Stuart kingship had become the quisling of formalistic and Laudian priests. A theme was the weakness of Stuart kingship at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 at which churchmen had sought to impose the thirty-nine articles on puritan priests and the Savoy Conference in 1661 that resulted in the Act of Uniformity of 1662.³⁶

Church reform rested on the supposition that human knowledge was progressive in nature and improving continually. Bishop Law explained in his *Considerations on the state of the world* (1745) that all aspects of knowledge improved with the passage of time. This included the realm of divinity, for 'as we continually advance in the Study of GOD's Works, so we shall come to a proportionally better Understanding of his Word'.³⁷ It was appropriate that the established church be reformed as human knowledge revealed its articles and creeds to be outmoded. As other institutions had undergone reform on these grounds and as religious knowledge had 'held pace in general with all other Knowledge', the Church of England should not be any different.³⁸ He later explained, following the failure of the Feathers Tavern petition, that it should be natural for Protestants to place the abolition of subscription alongside 'all fair opportunities to further, and complete their reformation'.³⁹

In pressing for the improvement of knowledge, the idea of learned ministry was central to the question of reform. The petition was largely the work of Cambridge graduates and had been signed by the entirety of the Fellowship of Peterhouse. William Samuel Powell, Master of St John's College, Cambridge, had previously defended subscription on the classically latitudinarian grounds that no human institution was perfect. The doctrines within the thirty-nine articles were the result of 'the general voice of learned men through the nation' and formed the nearest human estimation to perfection. With the latitude and stability that resulted from establishment, reform might follow later theological improvements produced by Protestant learning. In short, the criterion of sincerity should not be prioritised while religious knowledge was imperfect.⁴⁰ Blackburne, however, believed such a position

³⁶ Blackburne, *Confessional*, pp. xlviii-lii.

³⁷ Edmund Law, *Considerations on the theory of religion*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, 1755), p. 170.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁹ Law, *Considerations on the propriety*, p. 37.

⁴⁰ William Samuel Powell, *A defence of the subscription required in the Church of England* (London, 1757), pp. 12-17.

neglected the importance of sincerity. It risked reducing the pool from which a learned Anglican clergy might be drawn.⁴¹

The other function of an endowed clergy was to act as parochial pedagogues and pastoral exemplars of Christian virtue. Since lay interpretations were fallible, the state must endow clergymen to teach the gospel truth. Bishop Law made the passage Micah 6:8 ‘the Substance of all true religion, and the sole Foundation upon which it is built’.⁴² While not denying his divinity, Law placed emphasis on Christ’s role on earth as a preacher of simple moral virtue. Strikingly, Law likened Christ with Socrates, Stoicism, monks, and Rousseau.⁴³ Clerical pastoralia, inculcating moral virtue, provided a means to prevent the rise of enthusiasm. Blackburne proposed to continue the Reformation to purge the Church of England of popish superstition but also to guard the Church against losing adherents to the enthusiasm of Methodism.⁴⁴ Blackburne proposed reforms to render clerical functions parochial and pastoral, to restrict their role to teaching the laity as moral exemplars, and to alter the system of emoluments accordingly.⁴⁵ In Blackburne’s comprehensive church, the clergy would only need to subscribe to those requirements made at the office of ordination. They would merely profess their belief in the divinity of scripture and commit sincerely and conscientiously to act as pastors and pursue knowledge of the scriptures.⁴⁶ By such means, clergymen would act as public officeholders of the national church and inculcate true religion by their office.

Anglican latitudinarianism after the parting of the ways

Although a small number of reformers opted to secede from the Church of England, most chose to remain. They continued to defend traditional and comprehensive forms of Anglican civil religion throughout the 1770s and 1780s. But as the reaction to the French Revolution intensified, they found themselves returning to more traditional territory. Whatever their view of comprehension, they now had to put the emphasis on prudence. An example of this split is the case of Gilbert Wakefield who had been a Fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge, and had

⁴¹ Francis Blackburne, *Remarks on the Revd Dr Powell’s sermons in defence of subscription* (London, 1758), p. 3.

⁴² Edmund Law, *The true nature and intent of religion* (Newcastle, 1768), p. 3. Micah 6:8 speaks thus of Jesus Christ: ‘He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’

⁴³ Edmund Law, *Reflections on the life and character of Christ* (Cambridge, n.d.), pp. 6, 16-18, 22-23, 28, 30, 53-5, 59, 60-75.

⁴⁴ Blackburne, *Confessional*, pp. 400-6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 421-4.

stood among the number who left the Church of England following the failure of the Feathers Tavern petition. In 1799 he was prosecuted for publishing a pamphlet in which he criticised Bishop Watson's support for the French war policy of William Pitt the Younger. Wakefield claimed that Pitt's government represented an 'Anti-Christian tyranny' which was being supported by the established church, itself 'a fraudulent usurpation over that liberty "with which Christ has made us free"'.⁴⁷

Bishop Watson represented the surviving rump of Anglican latitudinarians who were increasingly alienated from the likes of Wakefield. He had written an anonymous pamphlet in defence of the Feathers Tavern petition which, he later judged, was 'in perfect coincidence with those of Bishop Hoadley'.⁴⁸ Watson's support for toleration has been explored especially in the context of his praise for the religious freedoms established by the French National Assembly in 1791.⁴⁹ But Watson's initial ardour for the French Revolution faded quickly and he came to defend a more traditional concept of civil religion. In his pamphlet *An address to the people of Great Britain* (1798), Watson maintained that there were 'great abuses in church and state' but that 'it is better to tolerate abuses, till they can be reformed by the counsels of the wisest and best men in the kingdom'.⁵⁰ He expressly cast his ecclesiastical positions in latitudinarian and whig terms – similar to 'that excellent man', Bishop Law, from whose friendship he had 'derived much knowledge and liberality of sentiment in theology'.⁵¹ Watson's precepts were Revolution principles, those 'of *Locke*, of *Somers*, and of *Hooker*, and in the reign of George the second they were the politics of this University' at Cambridge.⁵² He supported an established church without which 'the Ends of civil Government can scarcely be attained'. But he 'cordially' wished to see 'a Reformation of our Religious Establishment'.⁵³

Watson put his vision of the Church of England in Chillingworthian terms. He recalled that he 'determined to study nothing but my Bible, being much unconcerned about the opinions of councils, fathers, churches, bishops, and other men as little inspired as myself'.⁵⁴ Such interpretations were merely imperfect human understandings of God and, if

⁴⁷ Gilbert Wakefield, *A reply to some parts of the bishop of Llandaff's address to the people of Great Britain* (London, 1798), p. 39.

⁴⁸ Richard Watson, *Anecdotes of the life of Richard Watson* (London, 1817), p. 43.

⁴⁹ See T. J. Brain, 'Richard Watson and the debate on toleration in the late eighteenth century', *Price-Priestley newsletter*, 2 (1978), 4-26.

⁵⁰ Richard Watson, *An address to the people of Great Britain* (London, 1798), p. 147.

⁵¹ Watson, *Anecdotes*, p. 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵³ Richard Watson, *A letter to the members of the honourable House of Commons* (London, 1772), pp. 8, 34.

⁵⁴ Watson, *Anecdotes*, p. 39.

imposed on other Christians, became forms of priestly superstition and imposture. Instead, 'free disquisition is the best mean of illustrating the doctrine and establishing the truth of Christianity'.⁵⁵ He defended freedom of inquiry as a means to make intellectual progress.⁵⁶ But the limits of human reason, reliant in the end on revelation, meant that ideas of truth were mutable. An open mind opposed to dogma was the only way to achieve the best possible understanding of Christianity.⁵⁷

He repeated standard Anglican defences of learned and pastoral clergy. He published a series of theological tracts in which he recommended a series of readings for Anglican ordinands. First came the Bible: 'the only sure foundation upon which they ought to build every article of faith which they profess'. But lay Christians were not equal in their abilities and even 'the wisest men want on many occasions all the helps of human learning to enable them to understand' the precise meaning of scripture.⁵⁸ Support for learned clergymen was his means to prevent a *sola scriptura* system from descending into enthusiasm. It would also be prevented by a pastoral clergy and Watson duly recommended appropriate devotional works.⁵⁹ His reforms were both doctrinal and pastoral. He proposed reform to remove the Athanasian creed as well as, despite his own non-residency, reducing episcopal monies better to fund the lower clergy.⁶⁰

Another example of the survival of latitudinarian civil religion was Paley. He had not signed the Feathers Tavern petition. But he believed freedom of inquiry would result in intellectual improvement and a more liberal church settlement.⁶¹ He hoped church reform would come in a more enlightened period of history.⁶² If the church proved incapable of reform, it might find itself akin to the master of a family whose servants were more knowledgeable than he. Civil society would be ungovernable. Since scripture did not prescribe any specific form of church government, ecclesiology ought to proceed upon the basis of utility in maintaining civil order.⁶³ Blackburne and the Feathers Tavern petitioners had been trying to seek church reform on the basis of aligning Anglican ecclesiology with the

⁵⁵ Richard Watson, *An apology for Christianity* (Cambridge, 1776), p. 2.

⁵⁶ Watson, *Anecdotes*, p. 217.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁵⁸ Richard Watson, *A collection of theological tracts*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1785), I, pp. v, xii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, p. iii.

⁶⁰ See Richard Watson, *A letter to his grace the archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1783); *Considerations on the expediency of revising the liturgy and the articles* (London, 1790).

⁶¹ William Paley, 'A defence of the considerations on the propriety of requiring a subscription to articles of faith' (1774) in *Sermons and tracts by the late Rev. William Paley* (London, 1808), pp. 41-4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

dictates of scripture. Conversely, Paley argued that, since Christ's kingdom was not of this world, temporal establishment in religions should be suited to the societies in which they were to operate. Paley explained that 'Whoever expects to find in the Scriptures a specific direction for every moral doubt that arises, looks for more than he will meet with'. The thirty-nine articles were merely 'articles of *peace*' designed to comprehend all who supported the middle way between Geneva and Rome. But with regard to civil office, there should be '*complete* toleration of all dissenters from the established church'.⁶⁴

There also remained churchmen willing to defend comprehensive Anglican concepts of civil religion after the subscription controversy. Wyvill, despite being suspected of Unitarian inclinations, held Anglican orders throughout his life. Politically, Wyvill had organised the relatively moderate Yorkshire association during the 1770s and 1780s, which had achieved some success in the programme for 'economical reform'.⁶⁵ He had also campaigned for the Feathers Tavern programme. Wyvill's view of the established church was one of Protestant comprehension. 'Has not', he asked in 1771, 'the Rigour of our Establishment excluded Multitudes of pious and learned Christians'. Wyvill hoped to don the cloak of respectability to achieve some moderate reform. He was not convinced that more radical moves like seeking to organise Unitarianism would be politically worthwhile. He hoped that 'his sentiments in favour of a moderate Ecclesiastical Reform... might be more likely to meet a candid reception, and consequently to produce a beneficial effect'.⁶⁶

Wyvill's vision of the Christian commonwealth fitted decidedly within the category of Anglican civil religion. A truly reformed established church devoid of imposture, superstition, and intolerance would support a Christian commonwealth purged of old corruption by which parliamentary elections were controlled as well as politicians and electors bribed. This duty extended no further than pastoral care for a Protestant flock and pedagogical support in lay interpretation of scripture. Wyvill maintained his support for ecclesiastical reform despite the reaction of the 1790s. He supported abolition of the Test Act which, he claimed, would conclude 'the great work of Tillotson'. Abolition should be followed up, he explained, by a reformation of 'our forms of worship' in a manner of which 'Clarke and Hoadley' as well as 'Locke and Newton would have approved'.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ William Paley, *The works of William Paley*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1830), IV, pp. 337, 348.

⁶⁵ See D. S. Klinge, 'Edmund Burke, economical reform, and the Board of Trade, 1777-1780', *Journal of modern history*, 51:3 (1979), 185-200.

⁶⁶ Christopher Wyvill, *Thoughts on our articles of religion, with respect to their supposed utility to the state* (London, 1771), p. 8.

⁶⁷ Christopher Wyvill, *Intolerance the disgrace of Christians not the fault of their religion* (London, 1809), pp. 81, 85.

Among political reformers, there were more straightforward utilitarian conceptions of Anglican civil religion. Horne Tooke was an Anglican clergyman who had been associated with John Wilkes and was a friend of Jebb, Disney, and Lindsey. He had been present along with Disney and Lindsey at the Revolution Society on 5 November 1789 when Price gave his infamous sermon. Like this group of reformers, he had been educated at Cambridge. Yet Horne Tooke expressed to Wilkes his regret at having received orders, apologising for the ‘infectious hand of a bishop’ that ‘waved over me’.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he always kept his position as a ‘great stickler for the church of England: not on doctrinal points, but on the surer foundation of “civil utility”’.⁶⁹ The doctrines of the Church of England gave moral sanction to social order.

As Gascoigne has explained, latitudinarianism was in rapid decline.⁷⁰ A central breach in latitudinarianism lay between those, such as Blackburne and Law, who were content to theologise rationally and generously within the confines of orthodoxy and those, including those who seceded from the Anglican fold, who were prepared to acknowledge the potentially dissenting consequences of a liberal frame of mind. These divisions were exemplified during the parliamentary debate on the Feathers Tavern petition by Burke. To abolish subscription would revive ‘the dissensions and animosities, which had slept for a century’. The creeds of the established church should ‘remain fixed and permanent like our civil constitution’. Reformers should focus on preserving ‘the body ecclesiastical from tyranny and despotism’.⁷¹ In 1792, Burke spoke against Charles James Fox’s unsuccessful motion to repeal a number of statutes burdensome for Unitarians. ‘The principle of your petitioners’, he explained, ‘is no passive conscientious dissent on account of an over-scrupulous habit of mind’. Their dissent was ‘fundamental’. It ‘goes to the very root’. It was not a question of ‘this rite or that ceremony, on this or that school opinion’. It was a question of ‘an establishment, as unchristian, unlawful, contrary to the Gospel and to natural right, popish and idolatrous’.⁷² Burke believed the language once used to justify whig England was being used by Dissenters to subvert that very order. He also accused those Dissenters of incivility in religion. They were the inheritors of the puritans of the mid-seventeenth century.

⁶⁸ John Horne Tooke, *Memoirs of John Tooke*, ed. Alexander H. Stephens 2 vols. (London, 1813), I, pp. 320-1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

⁷⁰ John Gascoigne, ‘Anglican latitudinarianism and political radicalism’, pp. 36-8.

⁷¹ Cobbett (ed.), *Parliamentary history*, VII, pp. 276, 288.

⁷² Edmund Burke, ‘Speech on a motion for leave to bring a bill to repeal and alter certain acts respecting religious opinions, 11 May 1792’, in Edmund Burke, *The works of the right honourable Edmund Burke*, 6 vols. (London, 1906-7), III, p. 330.

The civil religion of Enlightened Dissent

Despite Burke's fears, the civil religion of Enlightened Dissent remained recognisably whig. It celebrated the albeit imperfect settlement achieved in 1688-9 as the basis for a truly reformed Christian commonwealth. As Price preached in 1759, 'our religious liberty is the crown of all our national advantages' and, in that regard, 'we are almost singular and unparalleled'. Dissenters continued to criticise Roman Catholic and high-church justifications for *jure divino* sacerdotal priesthoods. Price warned against 'ignorant pretenders to spiritual authority' across Europe.⁷³ He later explained that ministers of the gospel 'became, soon after its establishment' by Constantine, 'an independent body of spiritual rulers, nominating one another in perpetual succession, claiming, by divine right, the highest powers and forming a hierarchy which by degrees produced a despotism'.⁷⁴

It was even possible for Dissenters tactically to make use of certain whig shibboleths such as the godly prince-in-parliament. Priestley recalled how James II 'had almost subverted both the civil and religious liberties of his country' before the 'divine being... raised up William the third, of glorious memory, for our deliverance'.⁷⁵ Andrew Kippis appealed for relief for Dissenting ministers on the grounds that Britain enjoyed 'a generous prince of the Brunswick line' supported by 'a seemingly equitable administration' and 'moderate and wise members of both houses'. Kippis added that there were also 'candid bishops' and 'a liberal spirit in all ranks of men' with 'Toleration lifting her voice loudly in Europe'.⁷⁶ To this extent, Enlightened Dissenters were at one with standard low-church and whig conceptions of the Christian commonwealth.

But the Enlightened Dissenting conception of the Christian commonwealth went further than its Anglican counterparts. It cast crucial aspects of the 1688-9 settlement as nothing more than popish superstition and priestly imposture. The claims once deployed by latitudinarians, whigs, and low-churchmen in defence of the civil religion of Anglican England were now being turned against them. Jebb claimed that any bishop who supported subscription was a 'firm and steady' supporter of civil and religion despotism.⁷⁷ Priestley praised Jebb for his 'ardent zeal for the cause of civil and religious liberty in their full extent'.⁷⁸ Enlightened Dissenters revived older divisions between Erastian or magisterial and

⁷³ Price, *Political writings*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷⁵ Joseph Priestley, *Political writings*, ed. Peter Miller (Cambridge, 1993), p. 22.

⁷⁶ Andrew Kippis, *A vindication of the Protestant Dissenting ministers with regard to their late application to parliament* (London, 1772), pp. 51-2.

⁷⁷ Jebb, *Works*, III, p. 73-5.

⁷⁸ See Priestley's dedication in John Jebb, 'Doctrine of philosophical necessity' (1777), *Works*, I, pp. 129-30.

congregational governance of the human church. Price remarked that at the time of the foundation of the present religious establishment, ‘the nation was but emerging from Popery’. Was it possible that the establishment ‘should be entirely agreeable to the purity of the Christian doctrine’ and that ‘it should want no review in order to secure its safety, and adapt it to a more improved and enlightened age’?⁷⁹ Pastors who imposed upon the private and tender conscience of the lay Protestant should no longer minister to their flocks. The Church of England, Price concluded, with its creeds, articles, tests and bolstered by its apparatus of state officeholders, represented nothing more than ‘Popery reformed’.⁸⁰

Gospel simplicity was as integral to the Dissenting vision of civil religion as the Anglican. It was a point observed wryly by William Pitt the Elder, earl of Chatham, in 1773. The Dissenters ‘contend for a scriptural and spiritual worship’, he explained, but the Church of England had ‘a Calvinistic Creed, a Popish liturgy and Arminian clergy’.⁸¹ As Jebb explained, ‘the evils of government and the want of felicity in the governed... arise from the want of a moral and religious principle, which the religion of the gospel, unveiled in its native excellence can alone afford’. The ‘right arrangement of political power’ could only be achieved by ‘philological knowledge of the Scriptures’.⁸² Lindsey preached that, by ‘its peculiar advantages, its easy doctrines and most powerful motives’, the gospel enabled ‘men of little worldly account, and wholly uncultivated with learning’ to attain ‘great wisdom and perfection in virtue’. Gospel study encouraged ‘a love of truth, and integrity of heart, and a mind attentive to instruction’.⁸³ A Christian commonwealth purged of the popish apparatus of the establishment was now to be the best imitation of the principles of primitive Christianity.

For Anglican theorists of civil religion, the history of the pre-Reformation church was the history of superstition and priestly usurpation. Priestcraft and religious mystery had been the tools by which true religion in the form of the pure gospel and primitive Christianity had been subverted into an unwieldy faith. But for Enlightened Dissenters, this history had not concluded during the mid-sixteenth century. Between 1772 and 1804, Priestley published his *Institutes of natural and revealed religion*, *History of the corruptions of Christianity*, *A general history of the Christian church*, *Discourses on the evidences of revealed religion*, and *Notes on all the books of scripture*. These works formed a grand project recounting the

⁷⁹ Price, *Political writings*, p. 10.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸¹ Cited in Horton Davies, *Worship and theology in England: from Watts and Wesley to Maurice, 1690-1850* (Princeton, NJ, 1961), p. 139.

⁸² Jebb, *Works*, I, p. 189.

⁸³ Theophilus Lindsey, *Sermons*, 2 vols. (London, 1810), I, p. 29.

emergence of superstition and clerical imposture in the primitive church, tracing the account into the Reformation church but continuing its history into the eighteenth century. Any form of ritualism in outward worship constituted evidence of superstition. Any mystery, above all the trinity, signified corruption. He sought to demolish the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement as well as the claim that Christ mediated between God and humankind through his two natures.

In the aftermath of the subscription controversy, Jebb continued the history of corrupt religion into the 1770s. He recounted how the Reformation had freed English Christians from the tyranny of Rome for the supposedly godly king only to become the defender of popish superstition. ‘Our boasted Reformation’, he argued ‘in fact, was little more than an act of justifiable rebellion against our Spiritual head’. But ‘we renounced the dominion of the Universal Monarch’ only to ‘set up a Spiritual head of our own’.⁸⁴ The defenders of the Erastianism that had characterised the English church settlement since the sixteenth century had failed to make good their commitment to the Reformation. Reacting to Warburton’s *Alliance*, in particular, Jebb announced that ‘the Reformation... is but just begun’.⁸⁵ True religion, understood as the complete liberty for the lay individual to flourish in his exclusive relationship with God, could only be achieved by purging the magisterial justifications for the Reformation from the established church. The first reform must be the abolition of religious tests in favour of a creed based on the principle of *sola scriptura* study.⁸⁶ For Disney, too, who campaigned against the Warburtonian positions advanced by John Balguy, the failure of the Feather’s Tavern petition showed the need for further Reformation.⁸⁷

Price and Priestley provided a neat summary of the Dissenting vision of the ultimate end of the secular civil magistrate. It was, in the words of Price, to protect men in worshipping ‘God according to his conscience, and of professing those principles of religion, which he thinks, come nearest to the simplicity of the Gospel’.⁸⁸ Because Christ was ‘the only law-giver of Christians’, there could be ‘no such thing as human authority in religious matters’. The office of the civil magistrate was ‘not to interpose in any religious differences, but to keep the peace, to secure the civil rights of men, and to protect and encourage all good

⁸⁴ John Jebb, *Letters on the subject of subscription* (London, 1772), pp. 2-6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 15. Blackburne also dismissed ‘the politician’s religion’ of Warburton’s *Alliance* in *Reflections on the fate of a petition for relief in the matter of subscription*, (1772), p. 11.

⁸⁶ Jebb, *Letters on the subject of subscription*, pp. 16, 19.

⁸⁷ See John Disney, *A letter to the most reverend the lord archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1774); *Remarks on Dr. Balguy’s sermon* (London, 1775); *A short view of the controversies occasioned by The confessional*, 2nd edn (London, 1775).

⁸⁸ Price, *Political writings*, p. 4.

subjects of all sects and persuasions'.⁸⁹ For Priestley, the state could only legitimately act in the instance where the public good was better served by collective organisation than individuals. The 'good of the whole' dictated that the state subordinate the individual only 'with respect to those things in which the public can make better provision for them than he could for himself'.⁹⁰ Religion was not one of these instances. Responding to Warburton's *Alliance* above all, Priestley warned 'Mere Statesmen' that the 'most perfect freedom of inquiry and debate' was a more Protestant value than 'propriety (which is the same as utility)'.⁹¹ However useful an established church might be against practical atheism, its structures retained the popish superstition that withheld spiritual enlightenment.

The new conception of the state radicalised standard conceptions of toleration. Anglicans had sought to tolerate Dissenters whose theologies, they supposed, were wrong. But toleration, the argument ran, was the only means by which civil peace might be secured while an established church might persuade errant Protestants to return to the true religion of the gospel. But, for Enlightened Dissenters, toleration denoted a generous and comprehensive spirit towards all varieties of thought on the grounds that free inquiry, candour, and intellectual progress in all spheres would push Christianity towards the truth. Dissenters chided even latitudinarian heroes for their intolerance with regard to sceptics and Roman Catholics. Unitarians like Priestley lined up to criticise Locke for his failure to support the principle of full toleration.⁹² Sir George Savile, a member of Priestley's congregation, put forward the Catholic Relief Bill in May 1778. In the *Observations on the importance of the American Revolution* (1785) Price paid tribute to Hume, for 'by attacking, with great ability, every principle of truth and reason, he put me upon examining the ground upon which I stood and taught me not hastily to take any thing for granted'.⁹³

The task Enlightened Dissent set itself was to build a Christian commonwealth broad enough to encompass these debates without risking enthusiasm, civil disorder or persecution. Dissenters were still vulnerable to the Anglican criticism, levelled by Burke, that they were the inheritors of the frenzied and king-killing spirit of the seventeenth-century sects. But, as Priestley explained, 'whether we be called, or call ourselves, christians, papists, protestants, dissenters, heretics, or even deists, (for all are equal here, all are actuated by the same spirit, and all are engaged in the same cause) we stand in need of the same liberty of thinking,

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁰ Priestley, *Political writings*, p. 134.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁹³ Price, *Political writings*, p. 142.

debating, and publishing'.⁹⁴ Priestley sought to act as the standard-bearer for these ideals and wrote that something 'of the spirit of controversy seems necessary to keep men's attention to religion in general, as well as other things'.⁹⁵ Priestley's project might be compared with Price's *A review of the principal questions of morals* (1758) which defended the possibility of objective moral judgements made by rational individuals. Priestley also wrote the pamphlet *A letter of advice to those Dissenters who conduct the application to parliament for relief from certain penal laws* (1769), calling upon fellow-Dissenters to show their Anglican opponents that a community of rational individuals already existed and it was capable of intellectual independence, civility, and enlightenment. The pamphlet laid out his central maxims: 'to think with freedom, to speak and write with boldness, to suffer in a good cause with patience, to begin to act with caution, but to proceed with vigour'.⁹⁶ In that same year, he founded his *Theological repository*, which ran until 1772 and was briefly reborn during the 1780s, as a forum for such civilised and candid discussion.

Philip Furneaux made a similar argument in response to Blackstone. In the fourth volume of his *Commentaries*, Blackstone ranked Dissent among such crimes as cursing, witchcraft, sorcery, lewdness, and blasphemy. The Toleration Act represented nothing more than a declaration of parliamentary indulgence of Dissent, a crime which threatened 'those ties and obligations by which all society is kept together' as well as the sovereignty of the state.⁹⁷ Furneaux responded that the Test and Corporation Acts should be repealed because citizens should not be singled out on the sole grounds of their religion. 'Truth can only be propagated and supported by reason and argument', he explained, 'in conjunction with that mild and persuasive insinuation, and that openness and candor, and apparent benevolence in its advocates, which are suited to invite men's attention, and dispose them to examination.' The civil magistrate should make good the commitment to gospel simplicity by following the charitable example of the golden rule. A community of loving and candid Christians was capable of inquiring after truth. No 'civil punishments are adapted to enlighten the understanding, or to conciliate the affections'.⁹⁸ Religious tests represented persecution by enabling churches to dominate the secular power and augment their own authority.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Priestley, *Political writings*, p. 122.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁶ Joseph Priestley, *A letter of advice to those Dissenters who conduct the application to parliament for relief from certain penal laws* (1773), p. 455.

⁹⁷ Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the laws of England*, 2 vols. 18th edn (New York, 1840), II p. 74.

⁹⁸ Philip Furneaux, *Letters to the honourable Mr. Justice Blackstone*, 2nd edn (London 1771), p. 43.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

A minimalist conception of the state was justified by a faith in human improvability. The coming of Christ relied on the ability of humanity to prepare for it and rational piety was the key tool with which to achieve millennial aspirations.¹⁰⁰ The progressivist mind-set of Enlightened Dissent owed a great deal to David Hartley's *Observations on man* (1749). Hartley had developed doubts about the integrity of subscription to the thirty-nine articles while an undergraduate at Cambridge, eventually opting instead for a career in medicine. Hartley's millenarianism was combined with his doctrine of 'associationism'. He took advantage of the growth of the new science to argue that the confluence of men's intellectual faculties would progress humankind towards the ultimate truth. Although it was impossible for one person to achieve full truthful understanding alone, the association of inquiring individuals enabled knowledge to grow gradually.

The exercise of reason would result in millenarian achievement. There had once been a state of human knowledge in which those 'who believe can see no reason for their own belief' in Christianity. But 'the diffusion of knowledge' now spread 'to all ranks and orders of men, to all nations, kindred, tongues, and people'. It 'cannot now be stopped, but proceeds ever with an accelerated velocity'. The result was that 'the number of those who are able to give a reason for their faith increases every day'.¹⁰¹ To achieve such progress, Hartley made a powerful defence of free inquiry and open discussion. Ultimate truth had been expressed by God in the essentials of scripture and the operation of the world. Human formularies about these truths were both imperfect distractions and impostures. Hartley opposed 'creeds, articles or systems of faith', for it was 'a great insult offered to the truths of religion, to suppose that they want the same kind of assistance as impostures, human projects or worldly designs'.¹⁰² The arrival of the millennium would sweep away all such superstitions and restore a pure faith.

Philosophies like those of Hartley syncretised the rationalism of the new science with Christian revelation to provide a powerful conceptual basis for Enlightened Dissent.¹⁰³ The truths of science and theology were coterminous. Revelation was eventually to be attained by means of human reason. As Jebb claimed, 'reason is analogous to the naked eye; revelation to

¹⁰⁰ See Jack Fruchtman Jr, *The apocalyptic politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: a study in late eighteenth century republican millennialism* (Philadelphia, 1983). Some care must be taken in defining millennialism. For qualifications about the definition of millennialism, see D. O. Thomas, 'Introduction', in Price, *Political writings*, p. xi.

¹⁰¹ David Hartley, *Observations on man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations*, 5th edn (London, 1810), II, pp. 388-9.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 363, 368.

¹⁰³ For the ways in which the new science influenced theological discourse more generally, see Rivers, *Reason, grace and sentiment*, I, pp. 53-9.

the sight, assisted by the telescope'.¹⁰⁴ Lindsey believed the discoveries of Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, and Carl Linnaeus furnished Christ 'with new and unceasing songs of praise and adoration'.¹⁰⁵ Alongside gospel simplicity stood an insistence on the convergence between revealed and natural religion. For Jebb, the 'word of God, revealed in the scriptures of both Testaments, like the book of nature, lies open to us all'.¹⁰⁶ Priestley's discovery of oxygen was as much religious as a scientific step forward.

Such moral optimism signified a revision of the role of ministers of the gospel. For Enlightened Dissenters, it was perfectly legitimate for learned clergymen to preach the pure gospel and enable lay consciences to access scripture. But the dictates of the gospel and the growing moral capabilities of the flock meant that the appointment of clergymen lay properly not in the Erastian church-state but with the votes of gathered congregations. 'Jesus Christ has established among Christians an absolute equality', explained Price. 'He has declared that they have but one master, even himself, and that they are all brethren, and, therefore, has commanded them not to be called masters and, instead of assuming authority over one another, to be ready to wash one another's feet.'¹⁰⁷ Ministers could only be chosen and removed by the popular sovereignty of the congregation. If the preaching of the elected minister did not accord with the scriptural interpretations of the lay individual, he reserved the power to elect a new minister or join another congregation. The powers of ministers were not those of persecution but 'persuasion and instruction', explained Price, as they were elected by their societies to 'conduct to their worship and to promote their spiritual improvement without any other powers'.¹⁰⁸ Priestley believed the gospels dictated that the 'propagation of Christianity, or reformation in christianity, is comprehended in the general idea of *promoting useful knowledge* of any kind, and this is certainly the duty of every man, in proportion to his ability and opportunity'. Christ 'gives no hint of any difference between *clergy* and *laity* among his disciples'.¹⁰⁹

In the priesthood of all believers, the ideal of the learned minister ought to extend throughout the laity. Ministers of the gospel must remember, Priestley explained, that men should be, 'as far as possible, self taught' because 'the more liberty is given to everything in a state of growth, the more perfect it will become'.¹¹⁰ Price celebrated that the 'researches of

¹⁰⁴ Jebb, *Works*, II, p. 137.

¹⁰⁵ Theophilus Lindsey, *Vindicae Priestlieanae* (London, 1788), pp. 64-5.

¹⁰⁶ Jebb, *Works*, II p. 240.

¹⁰⁷ Price, *Political writings*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁹ Priestley, *Political writings*, p. 68.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 113, 111.

learned men among us have been pushed farther than ever they were in any nation' thanks to toleration of 'free and publick discussion' and to 'absolute and unbounded scope [being] given to free enquiries of all kinds'.¹¹¹ Price imagined the circle of liberty extending to charitable Christians who 'ought to be directed always to the heavenly state, and their whole concern should be so to live and converse together, as to secure a joyful meeting there'.¹¹² In 1783, a group of Enlightened Dissenters was involved in founding the Society for the Promotion of the Knowledge of the Scriptures. The Unitarian Society was founded in 1791 expressly to distribute tracts. These new organisations provide more than a faint echo of early eighteenth-century voluntarism including the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and the Society for the Reformation of Manners (SRM).¹¹³ However, the similarities should not be overstated. These earlier societies had taken the virtuous conduct of the laity as their chief object whereas, while sharing these aims, new societies founded by Dissenters took Christian enlightenment by means of free inquiry as their central message.

The priesthood of all believers required the exercise of reason to achieve millennial truth. Human interpretation was still imperfect and congregations of sincere Christians were deliberately to elect learned ministers to lead in Christian enlightenment. 'Reason, as well as tradition and revelation', explained Price, 'lead us to expect a more improved and happy state of human affairs'. Light and knowledge had been spreading and 'human life at present, compared with what it once was, is much the same that a youth approaching manhood is compared with an infant'.¹¹⁴ Thanks to free inquiry, there 'is probably a greater number of rational Christians (that is, of Christians upon enquiry) in England, than in all Popish countries'.¹¹⁵ Dissenting scholarship spilled much ink criticising the universities and seeking to advance its own academies. Oxford received most opprobrium. There had been a powerful academic synthesis of Newtonian science and liberal theology at Cambridge led by followers of Hoadly and Clarke.¹¹⁶ Cambridge had also proven itself capable of at least some reform, resolving in 1772 to abolish subscription for BAs, who nonetheless had to declare their membership of the Church of England.¹¹⁷ In 1779 the proposal was extended to bachelors of

¹¹¹ Price, *Political writings*, p. 5.

¹¹² Richard Price, *Four dissertations* (London, 1787), p. 351.

¹¹³ Sirota, *Christian monitors*.

¹¹⁴ Price, *Political writings*, p. 118.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹⁶ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*.

¹¹⁷ C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1842-1908), IV, pp. 363-6.

law, medicine, and music.¹¹⁸ A similar proposal had failed at Oxford.¹¹⁹ But the curricula of the two institutions had lagged behind the Dissenting academies from which, supposed the Dissenters, might emerge the learned ministry of a fully reformed Christian commonwealth.

It was also the role of ministry to encourage social perfectibility and Christian virtue by means of pastoral activities. The Enlightened Dissenting vision of social improvability combined the Protestant work ethic with the spirit of trade and the division of labour. It is a familiar refrain that these manufacturers and mill owners, tradesmen and products of the middling sorts, developed a bourgeois sense of Christian respectability.¹²⁰ But this is to miss the essential point, for it looks to the sociology of nineteenth-century capitalism rather than the roots of the ideal Christian polity. Political economy was a tool in the fight against popery. In its Dissenting guises, the spirit of Protestant political economy gained ascetic rather than opulent qualities.¹²¹ Priestley bemoaned the lack of industriousness among the poorer sorts whose time was ‘spent in alehouses, where they contract the worst habits, and often encourage one another in every kind of vice and licentiousness’.¹²² He was struck how Jesus came from among the meek and lowly and did not restrict his words for ‘persons of good condition’. He preached to the ‘many, and especially those of the middle and lower classes, as standing in most need of instruction, and most likely to receive it with gratitude and without prejudice’.¹²³ Upon resigning his living in Yorkshire, Lindsey reminded his parishioners that they had a duty to obey their superiors. He also reprimanded them for impious living and ‘all those noisy riotous games, always accompanied with profane oaths, and generally ending in the ale-house or worse’.¹²⁴

A further aspect of pastoral Dissenting ministry was the need to purge uncivil religion of enthusiasm. It behoved ministers of religion to keep their congregations productive in the pursuit of spiritual perfection. As Price explained in *A review of the principal questions in morals* (1758), human conscience was fallible and the dutiful Christian must continually attempt to right their judgement. ‘Moral agents are apt to mistake the circumstances they are in’, explained Price, ‘and, consequently, to form erroneous judgements concerning their own

¹¹⁸ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment*, p. 202.

¹¹⁹ J. R. Green and G. Robertson, *Studies in Oxford history* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 323-4.

¹²⁰ Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and bourgeois radicalism: political ideology in late eighteenth-century England and America* (Ithaca, 1990).

¹²¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London, 1930), pp. 95-183.

¹²² Joseph Priestley, *The theological and miscellaneous works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols. (London, 1817-32), XXV, p. 315.

¹²³ Joseph Priestley, *Socrates and Jesus compared* (London, 1803), pp. 37, 44, 45.

¹²⁴ Lindsey, *Farewell address*, p. 17.

obligation'. Enthusiasts like the Methodists had fallen into precisely these traps. Instead, it was a duty to inform the conscience 'in the best manner we can'.¹²⁵ Claims of authority were equally as repugnant among enthusiasts as they were among established priesthoods. Humanity was engaged in a constant and progressive quest for truthful understanding and it must subject every claim and opinion to the same rational tests of free inquiry.

Dissenting civil religion, ultimately, would not require an established church. The Protestant Reformation, including its magisterial variety in England, was a staging post in the progressive spiritual enlightenment of humankind. Christians were sufficiently unreformed and uninstructed still to require a publicly regulated religion to access the scriptures and guard against superstition and enthusiasm. The secular civil magistrate should defend the liberty of all private congregations, associations, and churches from injury. Hartley conceded that, in its imperfect condition, the Christian commonwealth required a church establishment. He warned against Christians uncharitably criticising each other for subscribing to its imperfect articles of faith. In some cases, 'it may be necessary to submit to some forms'. It was 'only where a plain act of insincerity is required' that it gave 'great offence to others'.¹²⁶ As Price wrote in his *Discourse*, 'I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs, the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience'.¹²⁷ The crucial point was that reform should come as and when the state of the Christian commonwealth merited it.

Priestley also exemplified such moderation. Realising that the abolition of the Church of England was neither necessarily propitious, as long as mankind remained in its current state, nor politically possible, he claimed not 'to plead against religious establishments in all cases'. Instead he argued 'against fixing every thing so unalterably'.¹²⁸ He proposed a series of reforms to make the Church of England more acceptable. First, the articles of faith should be reduced so that subscribers claimed only to believe 'in the religion of *Jesus Christ*, as it is set forth in the *New Testament*'. Second, clerical livings should be reformed so as better to serve the pastoral duties of the clergy and 'the necessary expenses of a liberal education'. Third, no clergyman was to hold civil office by his hierarchic status; therein lay the road to tyrannical pacts between ambitious statesmen and superstitious priests. The episcopal bench

¹²⁵ Richard Price, *A review of the principal questions in morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford, 1974), pp. 177-9.

¹²⁶ Hartley, *Observations*, p. 369.

¹²⁷ Price, *Political writings*, p. 195.

¹²⁸ Priestley, *Political writings*, p. 89.

was 'a relic of the popish usurpations over the temporal rights of the sovereigns of Europe'. Finally, toleration should be fully established.¹²⁹ The abolition of the Church of England would eventually arrive. Millenarian improvement dictated it. Until then, a programme not dissimilar to comprehensive Anglican visions of civil religion would suffice.

In the insistence on the gradual progressivism of human improvement lay a breach within Dissent over the propitious speed of reform. Disney represented the form of radical politics rejected by the likes of Price and Priestley. On 4 November 1792 he gave a sermon to which he gave the title 'The progressive improvement of civil liberty'. The sermon was a manifesto of Unitarian political and ecclesiastical reform, lauding America's achievement in redeeming 'herself from colonial oppression' and celebrating how the revolutionary French had thus far repelled invasion. It located consent, rather than divine right, as the central criterion for the legitimacy of civil institutions and granted the right of revolution in the instance that the contract be broken. Alongside reform to the criminal law, reductions in taxation, and the abolition of slavery stood the disestablishment of the Church of England.¹³⁰

Despite the radical prescriptions of Disney, Enlightened Dissenters were still whigs and they had to confront the realities of the 1790s. Revolution principles had bequeathed the godly king-in-parliament and the close relationship between the Church of England and the Hanoverian state. Most Enlightened Dissenters believed no set of radically alternative political or religious arrangements might be seriously canvassed while knowledge remained in the state that they found it during the late eighteenth century. Revolution principles had integrated public opinion to some degree within the arrangements of the church-state and therein lay the means of its improvement. The Church of England was unreformed and imperfect. Yet Price was pleased in 1759 that 'a great deal of that shocking rubbish' of popery 'has been cleared among us'. There was, perhaps, 'never a time, since that of the Apostles, in which the nature and design of the Gospel was so well understood'.¹³¹ Persecution, superstition, and enthusiasm were in grand retreat. Reform would follow the progress caused by candid debate and free inquiry. As James Bradley has concluded, the contribution of Nonconformity to political reform lay in its interpretation of the relationship between 'human autonomy' and 'ecclesiastical polity'.¹³² Enlightened Dissenters had laid out a vision of a civil religion that did not, upon the arrival of the millennium, need an

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

¹³⁰ John Disney, *Sermons*, 2 vols. (London, 1793), I, pp. 221-9.

¹³¹ Price, *Political writings*, p. 5.

¹³² James Bradley, *Religion, revolution and English radicalism: Nonconformity in eighteenth-century politics and society* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 137, n. 46.

established church but instead relied on myriad small congregations of rational lay believers with their elected pastors. Until then, the presence of the established church rendered religious belief conformable with civil ends.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

... something deeper and better than priestcraft and priest-ridden ignorance was at the bottom of the phrase, Church and State, and intitled it to be the form in which so many thousands of men of England clothed the wish for their country's weal.¹

The varieties of Hanoverian civil religion

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Hanoverian intellectuals were concerned with solving the problem of the status and public role of the Church of England by transforming it into a civil religion. Governed by the civil sovereign, the Church of England held authority over the interpretation of the revealed truth by its catholic apostolicity while recognising its infallible articles of faith as a *jure humano* institution. The ministers of the national, established religion were to preach a civil confession of faith on the basis of the gospel message of Jesus Christ alone. The civil sovereign secured its ascendancy over the ministers of the gospel, avoiding the problem of priestly orders destabilising the state. Irrespective of the veracity of the articles of faith of the Church of England, its status as a civil religion meant that all English people rightly observed its external worship. In so doing, they lived piously in this world in anticipation of the unknowable world to come. The civil religion of eighteenth-century England was one of shared rituals of public worship by which English people expressed their belonging within the Christian commonwealth. Hanoverian civil religionists developed arguments adumbrated during the seventeenth century by the likes of Hobbes and Harrington, transforming them for the Enlightenment.

There were several varieties of Hanoverian civil religion. Each civil religionist claimed to synthesise civility with piety to construct a church whose structures and beliefs were in accord with the interests of the civil state. Each claimed to harness the ecclesiology of the Reformation with the pastoral and learned ideals of Christian ministry in constructing a national church whose clergymen preached the precepts of the gospel in a worldly religion of sociability, happiness, and virtue. By the promise of primitive Christianity, ministers would guide the priesthood of all believers in purging civil society of the false religions of priestly superstition and frenzied enthusiasm. In the modern Christian commonwealth, thinkers of the Enlightenment in England would reconstruct the achievement of the ancient civil religions in

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the constitution of the church and state, according to the idea of each*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton, [1829] 1979), p. 32.

marrying piety with patriotism. Whatever their inward thoughts about the truths of the articles of faith of the Church of England, theorists of civil religion concerned themselves with ecclesiology and the public regulation of religion over theology and the risk of endangering civil society and the state. Each variety of civil religion recognised the civic potential of a patriotic national religion in securing a flourishing commonwealth of religious piety. This idea was emphatically not the same as Machiavellian civic humanist and Rousseauian republican aspirations towards prolonging the life of the city or expanding the martial commonwealth. Rather, its civic potential was directed towards a peaceful, polite, and sociable commonwealth in which secular relations were rightly oriented in the service of enlightenment and civilised society.

The first key variety of civil religion, Anglican in character, celebrated the magisterial Reformation as the guarantor of true Christianity and relied on the godly prince to maintain the true church-state relationship. It subjected Christian ministers to Erastian control to guarantee the direct soteriological relationship between the lay Christian and God. It was the faith of the defenders of the Revolution settlement in church and state. This was the civil religion of Trenchard and Gordon. In its clerical iteration, it defended the sacerdotal status of Christian priests within the Church of England while supporting the superiority of the civil magistrate. This was the civil religion of Gibson and Warburton.

The second variety, more elitist in mood, realised the need for a religious establishment to secure liberty and toleration by regulating priests. This was the civil religion of Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Gibbon, and Hume. In the context of the party battles of the Revolution of 1688-9, Shaftesbury went to great lengths to obscure the deistical potential of his arguments. Bolingbroke felt that his deistical writings could only be published posthumously. In the more stable world of the age before the French Revolution, Gibbon felt more confident in the polite world ironically to mock the pretensions of the religiously pompous and fanatical. Hume criticised English civil religion for its residual sacerdotalism and preferred the elective model of Scottish Presbyterianism. His engagement with Christian history also provoked significant controversy and he took great care to intervene in debates without harming the reputation of his Moderate allies. Nevertheless, each of these thinkers believed that religion was an intrinsic aspect of civilised society and they developed principled defences of the church-state relationship bequeathed by the Reformation. In short, they believed civil religion could have a Christian foundation.

The third variety, Anglican, yet heterodox, sought a broad-based and comprehensive establishment for the nation to which all English Protestants might subscribe sincerely. This

was the civil faith of clergymen like Blackburne, Law, and Watson. The fourth, related, variety was a fully-fleshed Dissenting vision of civil religion in which an established church would collapse in the face of millennial renewal. Nevertheless, its exponents like Priestley and Price insisted that the church establishment was necessary to regulate public religion so long as human religious knowledge remained in an imperfect state. Their civil religion existed alongside the national church in myriad small Dissenting congregations.

The central themes of Hanoverian civil religion were grounded in the supposition that an established religion, however metaphysically accurate, was a crucial feature of the civil life of this world. Reliance on the history of Christian Reform allowed theorists of civil religion to defend the supremacy of the civil magistrate over the established church and synthesise their Protestant ecclesiology with the civic features of ancient pagan religion, especially by reading Cicero. There was a constant suspicion of priestcraft and superstition in the effort to generate a vision of learned and pastoral established ministry. Civil religionists hoped to separate theology from philosophy and slay their monstrous scholastic and metaphysical offspring. They aimed to reverse perverted historical Christianity and restore true religion by separating devotion from virtue and good morals. Theirs was an effort to provide tolerant means of curing religious enthusiasm. They attacked the false virtues of austere Christianity, whether in its monkish Roman Catholic or extreme Calvinist guises, in favour of a religion congenial to commercial society. Civil religionists attempted to relate the aims of the Enlightenment – reason, toleration, freedom of inquiry, politeness, and civility – with true religion. Their religion was civil in two senses. First, it rendered religion safe for the civil state. Second, it made religion civilised.

As a result of the work of Clark, it is now common to interpret the eighteenth century in its ‘longest’ sense.² Despite the novelty, created by the Revolution settlement, of the established Church of England enjoying jurisdictional superiority while recognising a degree of statutory toleration, the church-state relationship secured between 1660 and 1662 as Charles II was restored to the throne remained broadly unchanged until Roman Catholic emancipation. Following the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1791, which removed some disabilities, allowed Catholics to worship openly, and to build their own churches and chapels, the year 1828 witnessed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The following year saw Catholic emancipation. These reforms removed one of the central assumptions of Hanoverian civil religion, anti-Catholicism, and presented a fundamental challenge, which

² Clark, *English society*.

Hanoverian civil religionists claimed to have solved, to the problem of the status and public role of the Church of England. The limits of this study have necessitated a focus on the eighteenth century. But it is worth enquiring into the survival of eighteenth-century theories of civil religion by exploring their reception in the thought of Coleridge and the broad-church movement that was so influenced by him. By his move from Enlightened Dissent during the 1790s to his defence of the Church of England during the emancipation debate of the 1820s, Coleridge reveals the survival of some of the varieties of Hanoverian civil religion. He also attempted to adapt eighteenth-century civil religion as a way of securing the status and public role of the Church of England in an age of Roman Catholic freedom.

Coleridge and the Church of England in the age of Napoleon Bonaparte

On 15 July 1801, Napoleon produced a document that shook Europe. The Concordat, signed with Pope Pius VII, secured reconciliation between French revolutionaries and Roman Catholics and the civil status of the Roman Catholic Church. Although the Concordat did not return church lands and endowments confiscated during the ‘de-Christianisation’ of the 1790s, priests took the accord as a blessing to return from hiding or exile to their parishes. For European Protestants, here was the latest instance of the historic compact between secular and sacerdotal tyranny.³ In England, Napoleon’s actions shocked Coleridge.⁴ Writing to his brother in June 1802 about the ‘wretched Business’, Samuel reflected how the Concordat ‘first occasioned me to think accurately & with consecutive Logic on the force & meaning of the word *Established Church*’. He concluded ‘very greatly in favor of the Church of England maintained, as it at present is’. His earlier doubts about ‘the effects & scriptural propriety of this (supposed) alliance of Church & State were wholly removed’ from his reflections. The ‘Church of France’ was ‘a *standing church* – in the same sense as we say a *standing army*’.⁵ In the country language of eighteenth-century politics, Samuel believed the French church

³ See Nigel Aston, *Religion and revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, DC, 2000), pp. 279-335; *Christianity and revolutionary Europe, 1750-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 261-2; William Roberts, ‘Napoleon, the Concordat of 1801, and its consequences’, in *Controversial Concordats: the Vatican's relations with Napoleon, Mussolini, and Hitler*, ed. Frank J. Coppa (Washington, DC, 1999), 34-80.

⁴ For Coleridge, see J. Robert Barth, *Coleridge and Christian doctrine* (Cambridge, MA, 1969); Basil Willey, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, 1973); J. T. Miller, *Ideology and Enlightenment: the political and social thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York, 1988); John Morrow, *Coleridge's political thought: property, morality and the limits of traditional discourse* (Basingstoke, 1990); Peter Allen, ‘Morrow on Coleridge’s Church and state’, *Journal of the history of ideas*, 50:3 (1989), 485-9.

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to George Coleridge, 3 June 1802, in *The collected letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1956-71), II, p. 803.

was an ‘instrument of state policy’.⁶ Although Coleridge claimed to ‘dislike & suspect’ the ‘Waburtonian System’, it now seemed to recommend itself.⁷

Here was a Unitarian becoming an Anglican. During his undergraduate years, he had moved in Cantabrigian circles of Enlightened Dissent. This was the religious world that rejected the Test and Corporation Acts as well as the jurisdictional superiority of the Church of England. It saw the established church as the next bastion of popish superstition to be dissolved by Christian Reform. It received the French Revolution in millennial pose as the next step in the perfectibility of humankind.⁸ In 1793, Coleridge demonstrated in the Vice-Chancellor’s Court in support of William Frend, the Unitarian Fellow of Jesus who had resigned his orders accused of ‘impugning religion, as by law established’ in his critique of the Church of England in *Peace and union recommended* (1793).⁹ In 1794, Coleridge developed a utopian vision with Robert Southey which they dubbed ‘Pantisocracy’ and proposed for the adolescent republic of the United States. In the summer of 1795 he gave a series of lectures on ‘revealed religion, its corruption and political views’. It castigated the ‘political applications’ of trinitarianism.¹⁰

This move from Protestant Dissent to Anglicanism provides the ideal case study with which to conclude this study of Hanoverian civil religion. During his Unitarian days, Coleridge argued from the precepts of Christian primitivism and the priesthood of all believers for a religion ‘of which every true Christian is the Priest, his own Heart the Altar, the Universe its Temple, and Errors and Vices its only Sacrifices’. Christianity was grounded on the simple truth that ‘Immortality [is] made probable to us by the Light of Nature, and proved to us by the Resurrection of Jesus’.¹¹ The basic instruction of the gospels was that ‘Christians must behave towards the majority with loving kindness and submission preserving among themselves a perfect Equality’.¹² In millennial expectation, the kingdom of God would arrive with ‘the progressiveness of the moral world’.¹³

⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays on his times in The morning post and The courier*, ed. David V. Erdman, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1978), I, p. 314.

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to George Coleridge, 3 June 1802, in *Collected letters*, II, p. 803.

⁸ Leonard W. Deen, ‘Coleridge and the radicalism of religious Dissent’, *Journal of English and Germanic philology*, 61:3 (1962), 496-510.

⁹ Frida Knight, *University rebel: the life of William Frend, 1751-1841* (London, 1971), pp. 118-19, 140-1, 144.

¹⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795: on politics and religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton, 1971), p. 83. For a related exploration of Southey’s intellectual development after the French Revolution, see David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic apostasy: political argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 79-100, 189-211.

¹¹ Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, pp. 67-8n.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Coleridge carried the *sola scriptura* ideals of English Protestantism to their Unitarian extreme. It was a Christian duty to ‘plea *for* the Oppressed not *to* them’. Reformers must imitate the Methodists in being ‘*personally* among the poor’. The Bible alone provided the true path of Reform among the lower orders: ‘By its Simplicity it will meet their comprehension, by its Benevolence soften their affections, by its Precepts it will direct their conduct, by the vastness of its Motives ensure their obedience.’¹⁴ Since Christianity is ‘so obvious to the meanest Capacity’ that he ‘who knows his letters may find everything necessary for him’ in the gospels, established churches bore ‘the mark of antichrist’ and were products of ‘an intimate alliance with the powers of this World, which Jesus positively forbids’.¹⁵ It is plausible to interpret here opposition to Warburton’s *Alliance of church and state*. It is yet more plausible to interpret the *jure humano* arguments of the Bangorian controversy taken to their extreme conclusions in Coleridge’s repetition of Christ’s claim in John 18:36: ‘My kingdom is not of this world’. There was no Christian foundation for this ‘dear-bought Grace of Cathedrals, this costly defence of Despotism, this nurse of grovelling sentiment and cold-hearted Lip-worship’. The church establishment inspired ‘Oppression, while it prompts servility’.¹⁶ It was noteworthy that every bishop but one had voted for the French war. Theirs was neither ‘the Religion of Peace’ nor ‘the Religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, which forbids his Disciples all alliance with the powers of this World’. Theirs was the ‘Religion of Mitres and Mysteries, the Religion of Pluralities and Persecution, the Eighteen-Thousand-Pound-a-Year Religion of Episcopacy’. Instead of ‘the Minister of the Gospels, a Roman might recognise in these Dignitaries the High-priests of Mars’.¹⁷

Yet, in Coleridge’s reaction to the Concordat, he began to move from the civil religion of Dissenting Protestantism to his defence of the Church of England in *On the constitution in church and state, according to the idea of each* (1829).¹⁸ His reaction also took its cue from Burke.¹⁹ The recovery of the Church of England reflected a more general sense of urgency about the state of the Christian religion in Britain following the outbreak of the French Revolution. The Church of England underwent a new voluntarist age similar to

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 43-4.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 209-10.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 68n.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 66-8.

¹⁸ Ben Knights, *The idea of the clerisy in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1978); Stephen Prickett, ‘Coleridge and the idea of the clerisy’, in *Reading Coleridge: approaches and applications*, ed. W. B. Crawford (Ithaca, NY, 1979), 252-73; James Engell, *The creative imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981).

¹⁹ Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the revolt against the eighteenth century: a study of the political and social thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey*, 2nd edn (London, 1960).

the period between 1688 and the 1730s. The Sunday school movement grew rapidly after it had begun to emerge during the 1780s. The following societies were founded during the turn of the century: Proclamation Society (1787), Church Missionary Society (1799), Vice Society (1802), British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), National Society (1811), and the Church Building Society (1817). Parliament also acted in its ecclesiological capacity to improve the parochial fabric of the English church. This was the motivation of Sir William Scott's Act (1803) and the Church Buildings Act (1818). Pastoral care by Christian ministers was to be matched with good buildings.

Coleridge and the Church of England in an age of Roman Catholic emancipation

The French Revolution was not the only force, nearing the close of the long eighteenth century, that motivated concern for the Church of England. The year 1828 witnessed the crescendo of decades of debate concerning Catholic relief with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The year 1829 saw Catholic emancipation. The debate had begun in 1825 with the proposed Relief Bill which, as a salve for concerned Protestants, also contained provisions to pay clerical livings from a state fund and to raise the property franchise to exclude Catholics. In extending civil rights to Catholics, parliament completely revised the basis on which theories of civil religion had been developed. It was during the crisis that unfolded in 1825 that Coleridge began writing *Church and state*.²⁰ In 1830, Coleridge released a second edition of *Church and state* with an attached essay entitled *Aids toward a right judgement of the late Catholic Bill*.

Coleridge needed to recast Anglican ideas of civil religion for an age of Catholic emancipation. He noted how the issue had turned above all on the central theme of godly kingship. The falls of William Pitt the Younger in 1801 and the 'ministry of all talents' in 1804 were due in part to the belief of George III that his coronation oath required him to defend 'the laws of God, the true profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant reformed religion established by law'.²¹ By contrast, Coleridge argued that the coronation oath referred to the constitutional place rather than the doctrines and creeds of the established church.²² Coleridge approved no more of Catholicism than any other English Protestant. He invoked the authority of Baxter in the 'spirit of Particularism counterfeiting Catholicity'. He

²⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the constitution of church and state, according to the idea of each*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton, 1979), pp. li-lvii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvi, n. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

condemned the ‘Church Tyranny’ and ‘the usurpations of their Hierarchy, and Priesthood, under the same name of spiritual authority exercising a temporal Lordship’.²³ But he no longer wished ‘to exclude any man from a seat in the Cabinet for worshipping a Wafer’.²⁴ His compromise struck at the heart of eighteenth-century civil religion. He argued that Roman Catholics must promise not to acquire any share of the nation’s wealth reserved for the established church.²⁵ Given that one intellectual justification for exclusion had been that Roman Catholics were incapable of sincere promise-keeping and temporal loyalty, Coleridge’s solution showed the difficulties in adapting to the new age.

There was, however, an even bigger problem. Coleridge could no longer defend the church-state relationship on the grounds of the royal supremacy by the crown-in-parliament because growing numbers of Dissenters and Catholics could vote and sit in the Commons. He needed to locate the integrity of the national church elsewhere.²⁶ To do so, he surveyed the ecclesiological history of the long Reformation and developed the proprietorial idea of an independent estate. In a letter of July 1802, he discussed ‘a statute of Queen Elizabeth’ which confirmed the clergy as ‘the great, venerable, third *Estate* of the Realm’. Anglican clergymen and their property ‘are an elementary part of our constitution, not created by any Legislature, but really & truly antecedent to any form of Government of England upon which any existing Laws can be built’. The ‘Church is not depend[en]t on the Government, nor can the Legislature constit[ution]ally alter it’s property without consent of the Proprietor’. This represented an establishment because the Church of England had its ‘own foundation’. By comparison, the ‘Church of France’, under the arrangements of the Concordat, ‘has no foundation of it’s own – it is a House of Convenience built on the sands of a transient Legislature – & no wise differs from a *standing Army*’.²⁷

The proprietorial theme did not imply a return to old sacerdotal Anglican ideas of the Church of England as a distinct society which had entered into an alliance with the civil state. The church was an estate of the realm; it was *a priori* part of the nation. Whereas personal property was simply the ‘*Propriety*’ of the realm, the property of the church was the ‘*Nationalty*’. These were ‘the two constituent factors, the opposite, but correspondent and reciprocally supporting counter-weights, of the *commonwealth*; the existence of the one being

²³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to reflection and confessions of an inquiring spirit*, new edn (London, 1884), p. 141n.

²⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to William Mudford, [28 May 1822], in *Collected letters*, V, p. 228.

²⁵ Coleridge, *Church and state*, pp. 156-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to George Coleridge, 1 July 1802, in *Collected letters*, II, p. 806.

the condition, and the perfecting, of the rightfulness of the other'.²⁸ Both the civil state and national church were 'two poles of the same magnet; the magnet itself, which is constituted by them, is the CONSTITUTION of the nation'.²⁹ The church stood beyond parliamentary control and it comprised the '*third* great venerable estate of the realm'.³⁰ It could no longer be controlled by a parliament filled with indifferent 'Liberalists' like the philosophic radicals, Protestant Dissenters, and Roman Catholics.³¹

In its new constitutional guise, the national church represented the nineteenth-century version of a comprehensivist ecclesiology. Its existence was grounded in the Propriety and Nationalty, not 'theological dogmata'. National churches were the 'Offspring of Human Law'.³² Their legitimacy was 'visible and public' rather than 'mystic and subjective'.³³ Belonging within the nation implied belonging within its church. It was a 'KINGDOM, REALM... OR STATE... of the WORLD'. By contrast, the universal church of Christ was 'the *sustaining, correcting, befriending* Opposition of the world'. It was 'the compensating counterforce to the inherent and inevitable evils and defects of the STATE, *as* a State, and without reference to its better or worse construction as a particular state'.³⁴ The church of Christ was truly an *ecclesia*, a democratic gathering of all otherworldly citizens, but the national church was an 'enclesia' or 'an order of men, chosen in and of the realm'.³⁵

The clerisy of the national church was to perform similar functions as the Christian ministry of English civil religion. It was to be learned and pastoral even though its legitimacy no longer lay in employment by the civil state to administer externals of religion by law established. Its legitimacy derived from the Nationalty. Its role was now cultural.³⁶ In formulating a national clerisy, Coleridge bequeathed to the nineteenth century the idea of an established intellectual cadre of elites.³⁷ The clerisy was 'grounded in *cultivation*, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our *humanity*'.³⁸ Coleridge believed his new vision completed the ideals of learned ministry that had marked

²⁸ Coleridge, *Church and state*, p. 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, eds. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, 6 vols. (Princeton, 1980-2001), I, p. 809; II, p. 747.

³³ Coleridge, *Church and state*, p. 116.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-9.

³⁷ Knights, *Idea of the clerisy*; Peter Allen, 'S. T. Coleridge's *Church and state* and the idea of an intellectual establishment', *Journal of the history of ideas*, 46:1 (1985), 87-106; John Morrow, 'The national church in Coleridge's *Church and state*: a response to Allen', *Journal of the history of ideas*, 47:4 (1986), 640-52.

³⁸ Coleridge, *Church and state*, pp. 42-3.

the long Reformation. It belonged to the ‘diffusion of light and knowledge through this kingdom, by the exertions of the Bishops and clergy, by Episcopalians and Puritans, from Edward VI to the Restoration’, which was ‘as wonderful as it was praiseworthy, and may be justly placed among the most remarkable facts of history’.³⁹

Learning was pointless, continued Coleridge, if it was not used for pastoral ends. The clergyman should remain ‘neither in the cloistered cell, nor in the wilderness’ but become ‘a neighbour and family-man’.⁴⁰ Coleridge drew from the defences of a national church by Harrington, the edition of whose works by Toland he had consulted, and Baxter, with whose writings Coleridge was familiar.⁴¹ Coleridge also read Bishop Jeremy Taylor and wrote how ‘it is really shocking to hear Christian Divines talk in the same way, that a Jewish High-Priest might have done unblameably’. The ‘lust of sacerdotal Power is at the bottom of all this’. In true Christianity, ministers were ‘only Teachers, Persuaders, Comforters’.⁴²

In developing a proprietorial conception of national clerisy, Coleridge believed himself to be improving upon dominant eighteenth-century conceptions of the national church. The idea of the church as a *jure humano* institution under the direct control of the civil magistrate had left clergymen ‘neither more or less than Government Cooks in office, to be kept, or dismissed, by the Ministers & Majority of the Houses for the time being’.⁴³ The ‘fatal error into which the peculiar character of the English Reformation threw our church’, explained Coleridge in September 1830, ‘has borne bitter fruit ever since’. The church clung ‘to court and stead, instead of cultivating the people’. The church should be ‘a mediator between the people and the government, between the poor and the rich’ but it has let ‘the hearts of the common people be taken from it’.⁴⁴ In this analysis, the relationship between the clerisy and the godly king was also transformed. The king was ‘Protector and Supreme Trustee of the NATIONALTY’ and could only act legitimately with the ‘Houses of Convocation’, the suspension of which in 1717 showed that ‘no great principle was ever invaded or trampled on, that no sooner or later avenge itself on the country’.⁴⁵

³⁹ Coleridge, *Aids to reflection*, p. 6, n. 2.

⁴⁰ Coleridge, *Church and state*, p. 75.

⁴¹ For Harrington, see Peter J. Kitson, “‘Our prophetic Harrington’: Coleridge, Pantisocracy, and puritan utopias”, *The Wordsworth circle*, 24:2 (1993), 97-102; For Baxter, see Coleridge, *Marginalia*, I, p. 230.

⁴² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge on the seventeenth century*, ed. R. F. Brinkley (Durham, NC, 1955), p. 270.

⁴³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge, 7 May 1832, in *Collected letters*, VI, p. 903.

⁴⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the table talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, 2nd edn (London, 1870), p. 109.

⁴⁵ Coleridge, *Church and state*, pp. 83, 99, and n. 3.

This new vision for the church-state relationship transformed the relationship between civil religion and political economy. Educational reform must lessen the degrading moral and intellectual impact of the spirit of commerciality that had so destabilised France and threatened Britain by enervating the spirit of their nobles. The clerisy tempered both the spirits of commerciality and aristocracy by its proprietorial independence. The story of the commercial invasion of the clerical and aristocratic spheres had begun in the aftermath of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ when ‘the spirit of the nation became more commercial than it had been before; a learned body, or clerisy, as such, gradually disappeared’.⁴⁶ The Nationalty also protected the church from theological trade and competing with popular sermon-gadding. Coleridge criticised the ‘mechanic philosophy’ and ‘spuriousness’ of Dissenting education. They showed the ‘morbid *symptoms*’ of a disease, enthusiasm, that had attempted to destroy an established church with a ‘mild and liberal’ spirit.⁴⁷

Coleridge’s transformation of eighteenth-century civil religion in its latitudinarian and Anglican guise for an age of Roman Catholic emancipation survived in the nineteenth-century Anglican broad-church movement.⁴⁸ The idea of the status and public role of the Church of England altered with it. Such men as Thomas Arnold rejected both the intense ritualism of high-churchmanship and Anglo-Catholicism as well as the evangelical tendencies of low-churchmanship. They insisted that the Church of England was a national church capable of tolerating various forms of external worship. For Arnold, the established church was an essential institution of the Christian commonwealth. It was an instrument of godly rule whose members were ‘directly called upon to Christianize the nation’. In their ‘true moral character’, the institutions of church and state were ‘perfectly identical’.⁴⁹ But, in its Dissenting guise, the civil religion advanced by the likes of Coleridge during the 1790s would also have an afterlife in nineteenth-century socialism. In their millennial iterations, eighteenth-century concepts of civil religion gave forth the religious languages of early English socialism.⁵⁰ Couched in the language of the apocalyptic, nineteenth-century socialists spoke of true religion, returning humankind to its primitive and pristine condition, and

⁴⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Literary lectures, 1818’, in *The literary remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, 4 vols. (London, 1836), I, pp. 238-9.

⁴⁷ Coleridge, *Church and state*, p. 69; *Marginalia*, I, p. 275.

⁴⁸ Richard Sanders, *Coleridge and the broad church movement* (Durham, NC, 1942); Duncan Forbes, *The liberal Anglican idea of history* (Cambridge, 1952); Todd E. Jones, *The broad church: biography of a movement* (Lanham, MD, 2003).

⁴⁹ Thomas Arnold, *The miscellaneous works of Thomas Arnold D. D.* (New York, 1845), pp. 510, 437, 493.

⁵⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in *Languages of class: studies in English working class history 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 90-178; ‘Religion and the origins of socialism’, in *Religion and the political imagination*, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ira Katznelson (Cambridge, 2010), 171-189.

casting down priestcraft in favour of the priesthood of all believers. In exploring the consequences of casting the eighteenth-century Church of England as a civil religion for later ages, the broad-church movement and early socialism provide two clear points of departure.

European and American connections

However, the implications of understanding Hanoverian civil religion extend far beyond England. Although the limits of this study have necessitated a largely English focus, it is valuable to reflect on the parallels and relationships between Hanoverian civil religion with, first, Protestant America and Europe and, second, Roman Catholic Europe. Since the scholarship of civil religion owes a great deal to American sociologists, it would be worthwhile to pursue the influence of Dissenting civil religion in England on the early republic. Concepts of American civil religion developed the Unitarian and congregational potential of Enlightened Protestantism.⁵¹ They deepened its apocalyptic and millennial impulses by perceiving the new republic as a covenanted nation awaiting the second coming.⁵² It was the civil religion of the city upon the hill.⁵³ Political liberty and Christian evangelisation were intertwined. It was the product of a revolution that had been motivated in part by the problem of Catholic toleration in the Quebec Bill (1774) and the interposition of Anglican bishops in colonial affairs.⁵⁴

It is in Protestant Europe that historians are more familiar with the history of civil religion. In Prussia, the idea of a civil religion is often associated with Hegel whose arguments owed much to the religious debates of the late eighteenth century.⁵⁵ In ecclesiology, German Lutheranism bore similar rejections of papal temporal jurisdiction as Anglicanism.⁵⁶ Theologically, Coleridge had become a student of the ‘higher criticism’ by touring Germany in 1798-9. He gained access to notes from the lectures of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, whose criticism of the Old Testament involved philological study of the contexts in which scripture had been composed and who questioned the veracity of several books of the

⁵¹ Donald H. Mayer, *The democratic Enlightenment* (New York, 1976); Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976).

⁵² Richey and (eds.), *American civil religion*.

⁵³ Conrad Cherry, *God's new Israel: religious interpretations of American destiny* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1971); E. L. Tuveson, *Redeemer nation: the idea of America's millennial role* (Chicago, 1968). See also Bellah, *Broken covenant*, p. ix.

⁵⁴ Clark, *Language of liberty*, pp. 384-91.

⁵⁵ Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: religion, economics, and the politics of spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1-137; Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, modernity, and politics in Hegel* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 16-56.

⁵⁶ Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), II, pp. 3-19.

Old Testament as well as the Pauline letters and epistle of Jude.⁵⁷ Higher criticism was a product of the clerical Aufklärung, whose exponents, like Friedrich Nicolai, conceptualised the Aufklärung as the product of the Lutheran Reformation.⁵⁸ The convergence of Christian Reform and the Enlightenment also motivated Frederick the Great in his early writings and reforms to the Prussian church-state relationship.⁵⁹

Hanoverian civil religion bore further similarities with themes of eighteenth-century Christian Reform within Roman Catholicism. Reformers took aim at the papal priest-king and his army of wealthy bishops. They were anti-curial in temporal matters but recognised the supremacy of the pope in spirituals due to the Petrine inheritance. The limits of this study have precluded investigation of the reaction of the English Catholic Enlightenment to theories of civil religion. Names such as Joseph Berrington and John Lingard have been associated with the Cisalpine movement that opposed Ultramontane papalism.⁶⁰ Bishop Richard Challoner provides another point of departure.⁶¹ The church-state writings of the English Catholic Enlightenment would be a response to Catholic Machiavellianism, which cast the pope as a Christian *imperator* and Roman Catholicism as the Christian version of Roman paganism: the religion of the pope's *imperium*. These were the themes of Giovanni Botero's *Reason of state* (1589) and the work of Tommaso Campanella, published in England in 1654 and 1660. Goldie has outlined similar themes in the Scottish Catholic Enlightenment.⁶²

Christian Reform and Enlightenment were grand themes in the ecclesiastical state of Mainz ruled by its Archbishop-Elector.⁶³ Similar themes can be discerned in Austria.⁶⁴ In

⁵⁷ Morrow, *Coleridge's political thought*, pp. 62-3.

⁵⁸ Joachim Whaley, 'The Protestant Enlightenment in Germany', in *Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Porter and Teich, 106-17. See also Horst Möller, *Aufklärung in Preussen: der Verleger und Publizist Friedrich Nicolai* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 246-54; Werner Schütz, 'Die Kanzel als Katheder der Aufklärung', *Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung*, 1 (1974), 137-71; Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the rise of historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 43-4.

⁵⁹ Frederick of Prussia, *The refutation of Machiavelli's Prince or anti-Machiavel*, trans. Paul Sonnino (Athens, OH, 1981), pp. 1, 80-2, 132. For a classic discussion, see Walter Hubatsch, *Frederick the Great: absolutism and administration*, trans. Patrick Doran (London, 1973), pp. 190-210.

⁶⁰ Eamonn Duffy, 'Joseph Berrington and the English Catholic Cisalpine movement, 1772-1803', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Cambridge, 1973); Joseph Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine movement, 1780-1850* (Shepherdstown, WV, 1980).

⁶¹ Eamonn Duffy (ed.), *Challoner and his church: a Catholic bishop in Georgian England* (London, 1981).

⁶² Mark Goldie, 'The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies*, 30:1 (1991), 20-62; 'Common sense philosophy and Catholic theology in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 302 (1992), 281-320; 'Alexander Geddes at the limits of the Catholic Enlightenment', *Historical journal*, 53:1 (2010), 61-86.

⁶³ T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803* (Cambridge, 1974); 'The Enlightenment in Catholic Germany', in *Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Porter and Teich, pp. 118-22.

⁶⁴ Ernst Wangermann, 'Reform Catholicism and political radicalism in the Austrian Enlightenment', in *Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Porter and Teich, pp. 128-33; Peter Dickson, 'Joseph II's reshaping of the Austrian Church', *Historical journal*, 36:1 (1993), 89-114; Derek Beales, 'Christians and philosophes: the case of the Austrian Enlightenment', in *History, society and the churches*, eds. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best

Italy, historians are familiar with the names Ludovico Muratori of Modena, Pietro Giannone of Naples, and his fellow-Neapolitan Antonio Genovesi.⁶⁵ Genovesi, a priest and professor of philosophy, had studied the writings of Cudworth, Tillotson, Locke, Newton, Clarke, and Bolingbroke.⁶⁶ His writings against the papacy stopped him from achieving the chair of theology at Naples at the instigation of the papal nuncio. Francesco Longano studied Hobbes, Grotius, and Selden.⁶⁷ Francescantonio Grimaldi was a student of Gibbon.⁶⁸ The overlapping of Christian Reform and Enlightenment can be seen in the history of Venetian anti-curialism during the 1760s and the synod of Pistoria of 1786. It was a theme of Giuseppe Capecepatro, archbishop of Turin, in his *Discorso istorio-politico dell'origine del progresso e della decadenza del potere de' chierici su le signorie temporali* (1788) and Cosimo Amidei in *La Chiesa e la repubblica dentro i loro limiti* (1786). In fighting the papal *zelanti* while rejecting the scepticism of the *Encyclopédie*, it was the work of Bishop Muratori who also developed pastoral arguments in his *Della regolata divozione dei Cristiani* (1747).

It was, most notoriously, in France that Christian Reform in the guise of Jansenism mingled with the Enlightenment.⁶⁹ The French Revolution during its earlier and more 'moderate' phases had roots in movements of internal reform within the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁰ Between 1789 and 1791, the Roman Catholic Church in France saw its right to tithe removed, its property nationalised, its corporate independence ended, its ecclesiastical boundaries redrawn, its regular clergy virtually abolished, and its secular clergy elected and rendered servants of the civil state. It is instructive to distinguish this phase from the period after 1791, which witnessed the imprisonment, exile, and murder of many clergymen, the

(Cambridge, 1985), 169-94; *Enlightenment and reform in eighteenth-century Europe* (London, 2005), pp. 117-20, 211-39.

⁶⁵ Owen Chadwick, 'The Italian Enlightenment', in *Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Porter and Teich, 90-105.

⁶⁶ See Richard Bellamy, "'Da metafisico a mercatante'" – Antonio Genovesi and the development of a new language of commerce in eighteenth-century Naples', in *Languages of political theory*, ed. Pagden, 277-302; John Robertson, 'Antonio Genovesi: the Neapolitan Enlightenment and political economy', *History of political thought*, 8:2 (1987), 335-44.

⁶⁷ See Koen Stapelbroek, *Love, self-deceit, and money: commerce and morality in the early Neapolitan Enlightenment* (Toronto, 2008), pp. 62-5.

⁶⁸ See Edoardo Tortarolo, 'Italian historical writing, 1680-1800', in *The Oxford history of historical writing: volume III: 1400-1800*, eds. José Rabasa, Masayuki Sato, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford, 2012), p. 380.

⁶⁹ Dale van Kley, 'Pierre Nicole, Jansenism, and the morality of Enlightened self-interest', in *Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France and Germany*, eds. Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin (Philadelphia, 1987), 69-85. For the reception of seventeenth-century English republicanism in similar contexts, see Rachel Hammersley, *French revolutionaries and English republicans: the Cordeliers Club, 1790-1794* (Woodbridge, 2005).

⁷⁰ Dale van Kley, *The religious origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the civil constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven, 1996).

introduction of the Revolutionary calendar, iconoclasm, de-Christianisation, the removal of church towers and bells, the temples of reason, and the cult of the supreme being.

The earlier phase owed a great deal to the ecclesiological impact of Jansenism ever since the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713) had galvanised antipapal reform movements within the French church by condemning anti-absolutism.⁷¹ Although Jansenists revived Augustinian theology, their opposition to royal absolutism, the French episcopacy, and Jesuitical and curial sacerdotalism lent support to Gallicanism.⁷² The civil constitution of the clergy was welcomed by such Jansenists as Louis-Adrien Le Paige who saw it as the reversal of the Constantinean subversion of the church-state relationship. Several Jansenists were also on the committee of the National Assembly that drafted the articles of the civil constitution of the clergy.⁷³ The ‘radicalisation’ of the Revolution might also be read as a product of the failure of the French Reformation which had left a superior clerical caste intact and in close allegiance with the sacral dynamics of royal absolutism by its propertied and legal privileges. It maintained an opposition to lay toleration and freedom of conscience that might have been worn down by stronger French Protestantism or Catholic Reformers like the Jansenists.

It would be fruitful for historians of the Enlightenment to investigate further how Christians who were engaged in the long history of the Reformation, albeit gently and often almost imperceptibly, lent their ecclesiological themes to the eighteenth century. One of the most important of these was the idea of a civil religion. Rousseau has given historians this idea in its most deistical and *politique* form. In so doing, he has provided a window into the influence of Machiavelli on the eighteenth century. But it would now be an error to continue to define civil religion on his terms. This study has shown how British theorists of civil religion developed arguments profoundly divergent from those of Rousseau. By studying those with whom Rousseau might not have sympathised, historians will begin to recover political and religious concepts that were once among the most prolific in eighteenth-century Europe and America but, today, stand among the most neglected.

⁷¹ Dale van Kley, *The Damiens affair and the unraveling of the ancien régime, 1750-1770* (Princeton, 1984).

⁷² Robert Shackleton, ‘Jansenism and the Enlightenment’, *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 57 (1967), 1387-97.

⁷³ Dale van Kley, *The Jansenists and the expulsion of the Jesuits from France* (New Haven and London, 1975).

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